

**Aeolian Resonance:
Acousmatic Sound in the Nineteenth-Century Imagination**

by

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Dedication

Dedicated to Susan Kay Ruth, Kathleen Agnes Maile, and Kathleen Cecily Brandon.

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates two ubiquitous poetic tropes of nineteenth-century poetry: the Aeolian harp and the poetic songbird. It approaches these tropes by way of sound, specifically, acousmatic sound, which is a concept introduced by *musique concrète* and denotes sound emanating from an unknown or unseen source. Scholarship in Romanticism has long accepted the Aeolian harp and the poetic songbird as foundational metaphors of the era, yet tends not to consider these tropes in relation to music and sound, nor has it attended to the sheer quantity of Aeolian harp poems, directing its interest to a few canonical examples. The originality of this dissertation is twofold. First, it brings to light several dozen Aeolian harp poems published between 1748 and 1888 and therefore expands the historical boundaries of Romantic writing. Second, it uses this archive of highly formulaic poetry to show how the tropes of harp and songbird function as clichés and thereby offers a new perspective on Romantic poetry.

Chapter one reads trends across this poetry, in context with theories of the acousmatic discussed in Brian Kane's *Sound Unseen* (2014), and Michel Chion's *Guide to Sound Objects* (1983); it argues that the poems attempt to erase sound's origins, mimicking the acousmatic sound of the actual harp and songbird. Subsequent chapters conduct specific case studies: Chapter Two focuses on a group of Aeolian harp poems written by and dedicated to poet Robert Bloomfield, taking into account Bloomfield's career as a "peasant" poet, alongside his career as a maker of Aeolian harps to argue that the acousmatic music associated with the harp parallels the stereotypical ways that peasant and laboring-class poets were portrayed. Chapter Three

examines Felicia Hemans's poem "The Nightingale's Death Song" (1829) and its musical settings by John Lodge Ellerton, C. Seemüller, and George Kingsley in addition to Letitia Landon's "Stanzas on the Death of Mrs. Hemans" and its setting by Alexander Roche; it tracks the iterations of the nightingale trope through sound, and its integral relation to Hemans as a poetess, in the years following her death in 1835. Chapter Four investigates the Victorian fascination with bird taxidermy, suggesting that this popular addition to homes and museums is integrally related to the poetic trope of the songbird. By setting canonical poetry such as Thomas Hardy's "In a Museum," "The Darkling Thrush," Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale," and Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium" in this unlikely context, this chapter explores the "becoming visible" and "becoming mute" of conventionally invisible and audible inspiration.

Overall, the purpose of this study is to recover a body of poetry either unknown or dismissed as unworthy of critical attention, devising a literary and cultural framework for the understanding of this work and the larger cultural phenomena in which it participated. It renews and shifts our understanding of discussed works by situating them in relation to these poetic clichés, rereading them with respect to contemporaneous and belated conceptions of sound, music, and ways of listening.

Introduction: “A Living Harp of Eolus”

O that sweet Bird! where is it?—it is encaged somewhere out of Sight—but from my bedroom at the Courier office, from the windows of which I look out on the walls of the Lyceum, I hear it, early Dawn—often alas! then lulling me to late sleep—again when I awake--& all day long.—It is in Prison—all its Instincts ungratified—yet it feels the Influence of Spring--& calls with unceasing Melody to the Loves, that dwell in Fields & Greenwood bowers--; unconscious perhaps that it calls in vain. —O are they the Sounds of a happy enduring Day-dream? has the Bird Hope? Or does it abandon itself to the Joy of its Frame—a living Harp of Eolus?—O that I could do so!--

--Coleridge, 16 May, 1808¹

Un Brilliant Ramage

In an 1840 illustration by French illustrator and cartoonist J.J. Grandville, two birds, a nightingale and a swallow, occupy the wooden chairs at a dainty outdoor table, dressed in the fashion of the mid-nineteenth century (the nightingale wears a tail-coat, the swallow a draped shawl)[Figure 0.1].² Some tea things are on the table, and the nightingale is singing a tune he reads from the sheet music he holds in one feathered claw. Nightingale’s head tilts dramatically upward and his beak is fully open in the act of song, while Swallow looks on with beak slightly open, as if in mild surprise:

¹ Coleridge’s *Notebooks: A Selection*. Ed. Seamus Perry. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002: 103, n.456.

² Although the bird species here seem to reference Ovid’s myth of Philomena, where Philomena and her sister are transformed into a nightingale and a swallow, respectively, the birds here are portrayed as a male (nightingale) and swallow (female), both by the caption and the birds’ dress. I discuss in greater depth the mythological roots of the nightingale later in chapter one.



Figure 0.1: “The Swallow meets the Nightingale” by J.J. Grandville (c1842).

The sheet of music faces the viewer more than it does the bird’s sight-reading gaze, and reads, “Par un Brillant Ramage” (“By a Brilliant Chirping”).³ On one hand, Grandville’s “The Swallow Meets the Nightingale” is clearly ironic; the mythic nightingale surely needs no sheet music, as its melodies purportedly spring from the soul of nature itself. On the other hand, these birds inhabit and define an aesthetic realm existing between clearly defined categories of so-called natural and human-made music and sound. Therefore, Grandville’s birds hover in the space of

³ J.J. Grandville, and Stanley Appelbaum. *Bizzarries And Fantasies of Grandville: 266 Illustrations From Un Autre Monde And Les Animaux*. New York: Dover Publications, 1974: 90, 149.

conversion between human and non-human music. The sheet-music here makes the nightingale's singing, widely understood as unseen, visible, and in so doing, calls attention to the cliché of the nightingale's song; this is what Grandville ironizes.

Therefore, Grandville's birds set the constructedness of the songbird as a figure of the "natural" in relief, and in so doing, conspicuously enact the tension between and the conversion from so-called natural music and human music. By performing the unnaturalness of the trope, Grandville's birds underscore the otherness of one of the nineteenth century's major figurations of music and poetry. Like the songbird, the Aeolian harp is also a point of conversion between "natural" music and human-made musics; the Aeolian harp and the poetic songbird overlap as tropes. This dissertation considers both the critical commonplaces around these two poetic tropes and the repetitiveness and banality of the poems themselves as areas of inquiry. Furthermore, I examine the Aeolian harp and the songbird specifically as sound tropes, employing a twentieth-century term, the "acousmatic."

Acousmatic sound, a concept brought to prominence in experimental music of the mid-twentieth century by *musique concrète* composers,⁴ offers a new approach to both the figures of the harp and songbird, and their existence as clichés. I demonstrate that cliché itself, as a form that emerges and evolves through repetition such that its origins are obscured, is interrelated with the concept of acousmatic music, which often involves repetitions designed to wash away a sound's origins: in the same way, clichéd figures and phrases erase meaning through excessive repetition. For the *musique concrète* composers, the use of repetition defamiliarizes listeners, erasing the source and creating a wash of sound. So too, do clichés, trite phrases and ideas: they

⁴ Briefly, the form often uses analog electronic methods, such as tape loops and vinyl record lock grooves, to produce musical works. I discuss this in greater detail in chapter one.

are akin to the “dead” language Shelley discusses in “A Defence of Poetry.”⁵ Shelley’s statement, also from the “Defence,”

A Poet is a nightingale who sits in darkness, and sings to cheer its
own solitude with sweet sounds; his auditors are as men entranced by
the melody of an unseen musician, who feel that they are moved and
softened, yet know not whence or why,

is now well-known, yet the second metaphor, “his auditors are as men entranced by the melody of an unseen musician, is often cut. Here, Shelley highlights the nightingale’s song as acousmatic, sound with an unseen source, emanating from everywhere and nowhere. We already know that the “unseen musician” here is the poet-nightingale; yet Shelley’s statement makes plain the poetic process of erasing the source of sound and expression. By linking the concept of the Poet to a figure of originless sound, this statement suggests, for this dissertation, acousmatic sound as integrally related to poetry as song.

The Unseen Songbird

*Sweet Bird that shunn’st the noise of folly,
Most musical, most melancholy!
Thee Chauntress oft the Woods among,
I woo to hear thy even-Song
--Milton⁶*

Milton’s “most musical, most melancholy” nightingale was certainly already overdetermined by the time he composed “Il Penseroso.” The bird sings a melancholy tune, but

⁵ In contrast to the language of poets, which is “vitally metaphorical.” Shelley insists “if no new poets should arise to create afresh the associations which have been thus disorganized, language will be dead to all the nobler purposes of human intercourse.” Shelley, Percy Bysshe. “A Defence of Poetry.” *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*. Eds. Donald H. Reiman et al. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2002: 512.

⁶ John Milton. “Il Penseroso.” *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*. Ed. William Kerrigan et al. New York: The Modern Library, 2007: 46-52.

that the bird remains unseen is equally important for this study. We—and the narrator—know (or can infer) the source of the song, the “Chauntress,” that is, the nightingale, yet neither we nor the melancholy narrator can view the bird that chants the “even-Song.” The poem also differentiates the bird’s song from noise (the “noise of folly”); while atmospheric, emerging from some place in the woods, this is still distinctly a song. The melancholy rambler-narrator continues the apostrophe to Philomel, “and missing thee, I walk unseen,” now rendering the songbird absent and the narrator invisible, in effect, displacing the unseen bird with the unseen narrator. It is now the poet-narrator who produces the melancholy poem (or song), and we hear (or imagine) the bird’s song only after it is reproduced by the poem. While this is no revelation with respect to “Il Penseroso,” it is important to note that the poet-narrator and the songbird also become one here by virtue of their invisibility. We then experience an inversion: the poet-narrator renders himself invisible, while the bird’s song becomes visible (and, potentially audible) to us through the poem itself.

The songbird’s invisibility is a crucial element of the bird’s poetic role (this is what allows Grandville’s joke to work, for example): sight is diminished in order for sound to dominate the poem’s sensory landscape. Four hundred years after Milton composed “Il Penseroso,” musicologist Brian Kane recalls walking through a college campus and hearing a tune by an “odd-sounding” bird; the sound was odd because Kane could apparently detect a recognizable tune—a distinct “song” that he perhaps already knew. Kane eventually discovered that the bird song was actually an art installation: the “bird”—an electronic speaker hanging from a tree branch--was “chirping” Madonna’s “Like a Virgin.”⁷ However, before this revelation, Kane notes he could have inferred that a bird was producing the sound, using the

⁷ The piece is by artist Dan St. Clair. See Brian Kane. *Sound Unseen: Acousmatic Sound in Theory and Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014: 7 fn.30.

basic knowledge that birds tend to sit in trees and sing. At this point, before the discovery, the sound was acousmatic, that is, a sound with an undeterminable origin, or an unseen source, which Kane *could* have taken for a bird. He argues, “acousmatic sound is not best characterized in terms of a division between two sensory registers,” but is “epistemological in character, articulated in terms of knowledge, certainty, and uncertainty.”⁸ In this anecdote, the uncertainty existed before he saw the speaker, and the sound could have been coming from any number of locations in the tree or sky.

In this way, Milton’s poet-narrator evokes the uncertainty of the acousmatic when he asks that “sweet music breathe /Above, about, or underneath.” Here, the requested music is potentially everywhere, atmospheric, and is in addition, “Sent by some spirit to mortals good / Or th’ unseen Genius of the wood.”⁹ The nightingale—the “Genius of the wood”—or an undetermined “spirit” sings this sweet music about which neither the source, nor the music’s orientation in space--“above, about, or underneath”—is quite certain, as the narrator either does not have a preference for where he would like the sweet music to breathe, or, perhaps because he would prefer this uncertainty. Either way, the poem invokes the acousmatic through the undetermined cause and location of the music requested. I discuss these two moments of birdsong, one a poetic apostrophe, the other an anecdote, to draw attention to instances of the acousmatic, a concept of unseen, originless sound which I will demonstrate underpins two of the arguably most popular poetic tropes of the nineteenth century: the nightingale and the Aeolian harp.

The acousmatic as a concept came into its own in the nineteen-forties, when the pioneers of the *musique concrète* movement explored music and sound without origin, experimenting

⁸ Kane, 94. He also notes that “[t]he difference between the eye and the ear is really a synecdoche for the different ways the mind apprehends the exterior world, modulated through the sense organs,” 234.

⁹ Milton, 46-52.

with ways to manufacture the acousmatic. The most recognizable example of these experiments is arguably the lock groove record: an LP that, once the needle reaches the conclusion of an album side with a lock groove, keeps playing repeatedly in a loop.¹⁰ The “lock” is formed by cutting the vinyl in such a way as to form a circle, a closed groove, rather than a spiral that breaks off in the center [Figure 1.1]. The repetitions caused by the lock groove were thought to induce acousmatic sound by effectively erasing the sounds’ origin and meaning; the repetitions themselves would displace the sounds’ origins, and become a “sound object” in their own right.¹¹ Schaeffer wrote, “Repeat the same sound fragment: It is not the same, it has become music.”¹²

It may seem odd to employ a concept from the *musique concrète* in an analysis of nineteenth-century periodical poetry. Yet this idea from the twentieth-century avant-garde can help us understand nineteenth-century poetic tropes that were utterly conventional and clichéd. The experimental can, in this case, elucidate the mainstream. In this chapter, I hope to illuminate what scholars and certainly nineteenth-century readers considered worn-out poetic clichés by examining the poetry in relation to conceptions of actual sound and music. I also look to images, as in my introduction, to show that these conceptions were also in play in the visual culture. The images I consider further underscore the importance of invisible, unseen musical production. As in the poetry I discuss in this dissertation, the images evoke the acousmatic, unseen music, ironically, by making it visible.

¹⁰ An infamous example concludes Lou Reed’s *Metal Machine Music* (1975): (the lock groove begins at 13:30): <https://youtu.be/6MquoMZ8iQo>

¹¹ See Michel Chion. *Guide to Sound Objects: Pierre Schaeffer and Musical Research*. Trans. John Dack and Catherine North. London, 2009: 11. 10 March, 2018. <https://monoskop.org/log/?p=536>.

¹² From Schaeffer’s *A la recherche d’une musique concrète*, quoted in Barry Schrader. *Introduction to Electro-Acoustic Music*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1982: 12.

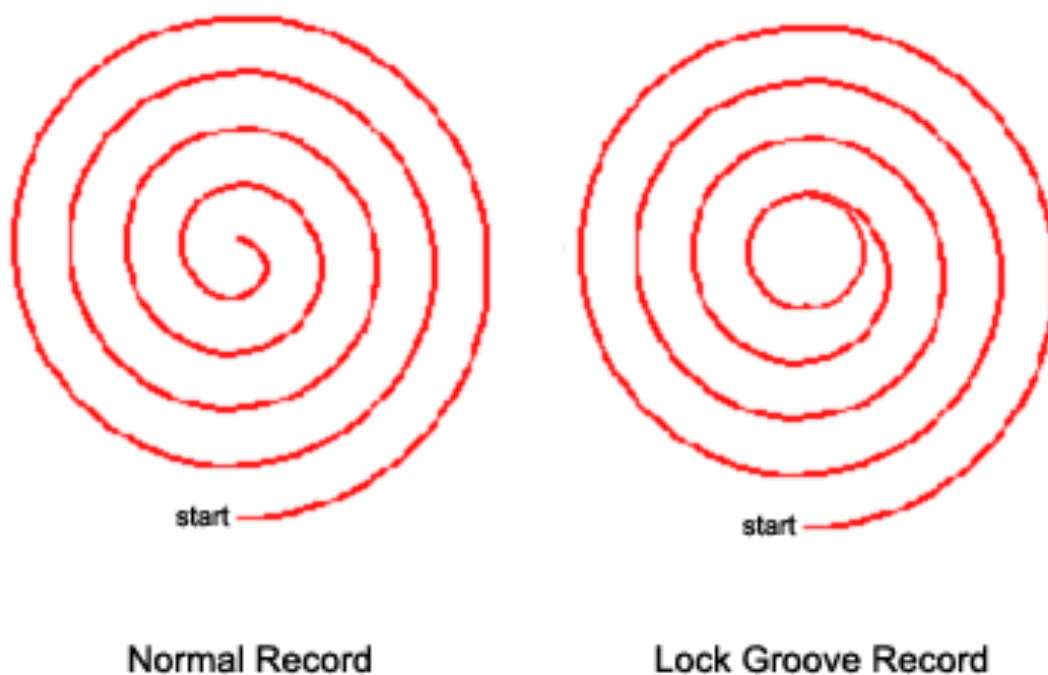


Figure 0.2: The difference between a normal record and a lock groove record.¹³

A New Archive of Aeolian Harp Poetry

Twentieth-century scholarship in British Romantic studies, that of Jerome McGann, Paul Magnuson, and M.H. Abrams, for example, established the harp as a foundational metaphor for the era and the Romantic ethos.¹⁴ Abrams in particular created the scholarly view of the harp that persists today: that of the Aeolian harp as a metaphor for the poet's mind, for sensitivity, creativity, and of the poet's interaction with and receptiveness to nature. More recently, scholars such as Timothy Morton and Susan Bernstein offer interpretations of the harp via Object

¹³ Image: <http://www.kempa.com/lock-grooves/>

¹⁴ See Jerome McGann. *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996. M.H. Abrams. *The Mirror And the Lamp: Romantic Theory And the Critical Tradition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1953; Paul Magnuson. "'The Eolian Harp' in Context." *Studies in Romanticism* 24.1 (1985); M.H. Abrams. "The Correspondent Breeze: A Romantic Metaphor." *The Kenyon Review* 19.1 (1957).

Oriented Ontology and the scientific analysis of sound, respectively.¹⁵ Yet, as I discuss in greater depth in chapter one, this recent work still relies on twentieth-century interpretations of the harp as metaphor. Engagement solely with major works, Coleridge's "The Eolian Harp (Effusion XXXV)", for example, is a unifying aspect of twentieth- and twenty-first-century interpretations preceding this project. Therefore, this dissertation historicizes the scholarship, illuminating parallels between that body of work and the clichéd tropes themselves.

A narrow focus on Romantic-era poets who became canonized later in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries ignores the sheer volume of Aeolian harp poetry published in the late eighteenth century and the whole of the nineteenth century. Between the years of 1748 and 1888, I have found over one hundred "minor" Aeolian harp poems. These poems are highly conventional, sentimental works that appeared most often in the pages of the periodicals. My purpose here is not to closely read each and every Aeolian harp or nightingale poem, but to consider the volume of Aeolian harp and nightingale poems as a whole by identifying trends, and discussing some representative examples. This means that reading just one, or even five Aeolian harp poems closely would not give us the same sense as considering, say, seventy-five from a distance. Observing overall trends can bring to light patterns previously unconsidered: my focus on repetition and cliché is an example of this. While I look at the group of these poems as a whole—as a genre—my analysis of them as a group creates the foundation for my approach to the poems and visual representations that I do examine via close reading in the following chapters. I consider the poems as a group first, then I examine individual poems in more detail.

Major, heavily discussed works certainly trade in the tropes I discuss here (we've already seen one of Milton's contributions), and Coleridge's poem on the subject is perhaps the best-

¹⁵ See Timothy Morton. "Of Matter and Meter: Environmental Form in Coleridge's 'Effusion 35' and 'The Eolian Harp,'" *Literature Compass* 5.2 (2008); Susan Bernstein. "On Music Framed: The Eolian Harp in Romantic Writing." *The Figure of Music in Nineteenth-Century British Poetry*. Phyllis Weliver, Ed. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005.

known example of the Aeolian harp genre. My archive, by contrast, consists of a large amount of popular, sentimental poetry, that is, the kinds of poems that have been largely forgotten in the archives, buried in the poetry sections of countless periodicals, dated both before and long after Coleridge's effusion. It is this archive I will discuss here, and it is this material that provides us with significant insights into the tropes of the Aeolian harp and the songbird. These poems were widely available, periodicals being a fraction of the price of a book of poems or novel by any single author. Yet these types of poems also appeared in the popular and expensive gift annuals; these tropes permeated the arenas of sentimental literature. This dissertation therefore explores the tension between, on one hand, the random and atmospheric nature of the actual sound of the harp and the bird and, on the other hand, their highly standardized, hackneyed portrayal in the poetry. The current critical landscape with respect to the Aeolian harp and the poetic songbird largely ignores the ways actual sound and music are crucially intertwined with these figures. It would not be accurate to say that this study considers what lies beyond, or beneath, the cliché, but rather, it looks directly *at* the clichés, or tropes, which themselves form a vast and complex landscape on the surface.

The Acousmatic Mode

To understand the Aeolian harp and the song of the nightingale not solely as poetic tropes but as related to actual sound and scenes of listening, I will now turn to the school of thought around *musique concrète*, which emerged in the nineteen forties.¹⁶ Pierre Schaeffer, and later, Michel

¹⁶ Schrader recounts the origins of the term "*musique concrète*": "Schaeffer decided to call his work *musique concrète* because of the ways it differed from 'traditional' music. Instrumental music [Schaeffer] noted, was 'abstract'[quoting Schaeffer]: The qualification of 'abstract' is used to describe ordinary music because it is first conceived of in the mind, then notated on paper, and finally realized only by instrumental performance. *Musique concrète*, on the other hand, begins with pre-existing sound elements, which may be music or noise. These elements are then experimentally manipulated and a montage is created. The final composition is a result of these experiments

Chion, discuss a concept of “acousmatic” sound; Chion’s definition, or rather, Chion’s reformulation of Schaeffer’s definition appears in his *Guide to Sound Objects* (1983), an attempt to break down and organize the ideas in Pierre Schaeffer’s lengthy and less systematic *Traité des Objets Musicaux* (1966). The definition offered by Chion is as follows:

Acousmatic: a rare word, derived from the Greek, and defined in the dictionary as a adjective, indicating a sound that one hears without seeing what causes it. The word was taken up again by Pierre Schaeffer and Jérôme Peignot to describe an experience which is very common today but whose consequences are more or less unrecognized, consisting of hearing sounds with no visible cause on the radio, records, telephone, tape recorder etc. Acousmatic listening is the opposite of direct listening, which is the ‘natural’ situation where sound sources are present and visible. The acousmatic situation changes the way we hear. By isolating the sound from the ‘audiovisual complex’ to which it initially belonged, it creates favorable conditions for reduced listening which concentrates on the sound for its own sake, as sound object, independently of its cause or its meaning (although reduced listening can also take place, but with greater difficulty, in a direct listening situation).¹⁷

Chion goes on to quote Schaeffer: “the listening itself becomes the origin of the phenomenon to be studied.”¹⁸ According to Chion, reduced listening is to “‘put to one side’ the consideration of what the sound refers to, in order to consider the sound event in itself.”¹⁹ In addition, Chion calls reduced listening an “attitude,” one that “consists in listening to the sound *for its own sake*, as a

and the ideas contained in the sketches for the work. These sketches, however, cannot resemble traditional music notation.” *Introduction to Electro-Acoustic Music*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1982.

¹⁷ Michel Chion. *Guide to Sound Objects: Pierre Schaeffer and Musical Research*. Trans. John Dack and Catherine North. London, 2009: 11. 10 March, 2018. <https://monoskop.org/log/?p=536>.

¹⁸ Chion, 12. I will show later in this chapter that much of the Aeolian harp poetry describes these types of listening events.

¹⁹ Chion, 29.

sound object, by removing its real or supposed source and the meaning it may convey.”²⁰ Kane also considers reduced listening and acousmaticity as a type of attitude and decision-making on the part of the listener; he argues it is not “an intrinsic quality of the sound itself.” Kane further suggests that “knowing the means of production is an effective way of reducing acousmaticity,” that is, the more we know about where or what a sound comes from, the less we’re able to consider the sound as an object in itself.²¹ In this way, Kane expands on Chion and Schaeffer, by focusing more directly the listener’s own decisions and mindset: acousmaticity, for Kane, exists a continuum based on the listener’s knowledge and perception.

We can know it is the radio that is playing, but we don’t see the musicians, instruments, or the radio announcer.²² In a similar way, if we had an Aeolian harp in the window on a breezy day, we would hear, in a sense, the unseen wind. This was very much the way the Aeolian harp’s sounds were characterized in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: the harp was regarded as an instrument that made nature, the wind specifically, audible--just as the nightingale was understood as an unseen songbird that made “nature” audible. In a sense, these tropes, and their real-life counterparts, prefigured the kinds of sound technologies used by the *musique concrète* composers: technologies that produce acousmatic listening events, for example, the vinyl record lock groove discussed above.

While, as Kane suggests, knowledge of a sound’s source can work to reduce its acousmatic qualities, I will show that poetry about the Aeolian harp and the nightingale--where most often the narrator/listener, and certainly the reader--do know the means of production, works to *induce* acousmaticity. The poems induce the acousmatic in part because this type of

²⁰ Chion, 30.

²¹ Kane, 225.

²² Although Kane does point out a difference between acousmatic sound and “schizophonic” sounds: schizophonic sound “requires both a copy and an original,” so by this measure, songs on an LP for example would be schizophonic, and could potentially also be acousmatic. Kane, 225.

listening and hearing was desirable: not only was the Aeolian harp a popular domestic instrument, Kane mentions the vogue for hidden orchestras in the nineteenth century: entire orchestras shielded by elaborate screens meant to block the audience's view of the musicians, leaving only the music itself for consideration.²³ Hidden musicians evoke the “unseen musician” of the woods, or the “unseen hand” that strums the Aeolian harp in a window casement. Writing about the acousmatic in *The Audible Past* (2003), Jonathan Sterne turns to John Corbett, who, Stern notes, uses a “specifically psychoanalytic framework to talk about reproduce sound in terms of visual lack: ‘It is the lack of the visual, endemic to recorded sound, that initiates desire in relation to the popular music object.’”²⁴ The unseen itself potentially creates the desire for this particular kind of listening event. Writing about the souvenir, Susan Stewart argues, “The only proper context for the souvenir is the displacement of reverie, the gap between origin/object/subject which fields desire.”²⁵ This “gap” is potentially another way of thinking about why acousmatic sound was (and is) desirable: the “reverie” can only exist in the “gap between origin/object/subject.”

What ties the tropes of the Aeolian harp and the poetic songbird together, then, is not only their long, repetitive, sentimental lives in periodical and nineteenth-century poetry more broadly, but importantly, their rootedness in actual sound and listening events. It would be anachronistic to apply all of the aspects of *musique concrète*—which relied on twentieth-century

²³ Discussing the Bayreuth festival hall and its hidden orchestra pit, Kane also notes several precursors to the ideas behind Bayreuth's design. The earliest, from Grétry's *Memoires* in 1797, suggests the orchestra should be “out of sight...so that neither the musicians nor the lights of the music desks can be seen by the audience”; Kane also mentions Ignaz Ferdinand Arnold, who, in 1806 argued that “[i]n order to increase the pleasure of the music, the musician should be invisible, either covered with a screen..., or a music hall should be built so that one does not notice the musicians.” Grétry and Arnold qt in Kane pp 102, 103.

²⁴ See Jonathan Sterne. *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003: 20.

²⁵ Susan Stewart. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. 1st paperback ed. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993: 150. I discuss Stewart's ideas at greater length in chapter four, with respect to taxidermy.

electronic recording tools and media in its recording practices—wholesale to the Aeolian harp and the nightingale. However, the concepts theorized by Schaeffer, Chion, and more recently and expansively, Kane, alert us to the ways the harp and bird evoked, or even required, a certain type of listening. This acousmatic listening situation inflected the Aeolian harp and songbirds' existence *as* the kinds of clichéd tropes we see occurring again and again in the literature.

According to Susan Bernstein, “[i]f we forget about the labor, the knowledge—the *techné*—implied in the harp, we hear only the resonance of this other” (the ‘other’ here being, for Bernstein, the “moments of unity between man and nature” that she claims the Aeolian harp is supposed to bring about, and the hearing of nature’s own voice).²⁶ The effect Bernstein is suggesting here is similar to Schaeffer and Chion’s concept of “reduced listening”; which works by “removing [the sound’s] real or supposed source and the meaning it may convey,” as Chion writes. The harp’s *sounds* resonate in the act of listening as we “put to one side” the sound’s source.²⁷ In this sense, I want to focus on the resonance itself, and the way these poems attempt to create an environment in which the *techné* is stripped away, to produce a highly valued type of listening: the “acousmatic mode.” This is not a new term, Ewan Stefani and Cristophe de Bézenac, for example, discuss an acousmatic mode with respect to live performance and listening. However, I here want to discuss an “acousmatic mode” specifically with respect to the archive of Aeolian harp poetry. I suggest that this poetry evokes and attempts to induce an

²⁶ This “unity” corresponds to Shelley’s arguments in “A Defence of Poetry”: “Man is an instrument over which a series of external and internal impressions are driven, like the alternations of an ever-changing wind over an Æolian lyre, which move it by their motion to every-changing melody. But there is a principle within the human being, and perhaps within all sentient beings, which acts otherwise than in the lyre, and produces not melody alone, but harmony, by an internal adjustment of the sounds or motions thus excited to the impressions which excite them.” Bernstein. “On Music Framed.” *The Figure of Music in Nineteenth-Century British Poetry*. Ed. Phyllis Weliver. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005: 75. See also Percy Bysshe Shelley. “A Defence of Poetry.” *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*. Eds Donald H. Reiman et al. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002: 511.

²⁷ Michel Chion. *Guide to Sound Objects: Pierre Schaeffer and Musical Research*. Trans. John Dack and Catherine North. London, 2009: 30. 10 March, 2018. <https://monoskop.org/log/?p=536>.

acousmatic scene of listening.²⁸

The *musique concrète* composers attempted to create this type of listening, using mechanical repetition, through tape loops, for example, to induce a reduced listening situation, the idea being that once a sound is heard repeatedly, the awareness of its source will wash away in the flood of repetition. A lock groove will repeat endlessly as long as the needle stays on the record and the turntable is on. These ideas about repetition in *musique concrète* can also help us think through the repetitiveness and banality of the harp and songbird tropes in the poems I discuss.

Repetitions as Clichés

An image or idea does not emerge as a cliché or banality fully formed as such; instead, repetition creates an idea or phrase's status as cliché. In this way, it is the repetition that makes a too-often repeated idea ineffective and without impact. Importantly, excessive repetition seemingly erases an idea's or a phrase's origins, much like the intended effect of the lock grooves mentioned above, for example. Orin Hargraves notes, "[t]he difficulty that arises in the very definition of cliché is that its principal characteristics—overuse and ineffectiveness—are not objectively measureable," and that "[n]early all judgments about what constitutes a cliché have traditionally relied on consensus."²⁹ Originally the French term for a block used most often to print engravings (a "stereotype block") in the 1830s, and later used to denote a photo negative the word "cliché" itself is also intimately related to print.³⁰

²⁸ See Ewan Stefani and Christophe de Bénézac, "(In)Visible Sound: Acousmatic and Audiovisual Listening in Live Performance." http://www.academia.edu/4365295/Acousmatic_and_audiovisual_listening_in_live_performance.

²⁹ See Orin Hargraves. *It's Been Said Before: A Guide to the Use and Abuse of Clichés*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014: 4. See also Eric Partridge. *A Dictionary of Clichés*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul LTD, 1960.

³⁰ See Tricia Lootens. *The Political Poetess: Victorian Femininity, Race, And the Legacy of Separate Spheres*. 1st edition. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016: 122.

Relevant here is Tricia Lootens's point that the word "cliché" after the French *cliquer*, is onomatopoeic: cliché, as a term, is rooted in sound. Lootens's attention to the sound of mechanical reproduction also recalls the sound experiments by Schaeffer and those involved in *musique concrète* designed to induce "reduced listening" by creating sequences of repetition in order to obscure awareness of the sound's origin, to isolate the sound itself for consideration. "Clichés, clicked," Lootens argues, "...claim our attention, that is, as processes, ongoing echoes, secondary effects of dangerous mechanical reproduction processes."³¹ While Lootens is interested in the metaphor of a "potentially unstable" process (that of casting with molten metal), I am concerned with cliché as a sound term integrally related to repetition.³²

Reproduction is the characteristic that undergirds cliché and its relative equivalents -- they are too often repeated; the corollary, then, is that they are too often heard. Repetition is essential to cliché, and part of the reason clichés must be arrived at by consensus, as Hargraves argues. In this way, clichéd, hackneyed ideas and phrases are emergent, their clichéd status arising from and contingent upon repetition. I suggest there is an integral relationship between cliché and the idea of acousmatic essential to the poetic tropes of the Aeolian harp and the nightingale. We can think of clichés *as* originless in a sense, as they seemingly emerge from everywhere and nowhere. Yet, while the harp and songbird are themselves clichéd set-pieces, repeated again and again in highly formulaic poetry, they produce an idea of originless, varied, non-human music. The actual sounds of the Aeolian harp and the nightingale are in fact anything but formulaic, that is, they do not "click" regularly; instead, they are random, without structured melody or rhythm, and they sound intermittently—the polar opposite of a stereotype printing

³¹ Lootens argues that "reading for the click of the cliché seems likely to entail approaching sentimental poetic reading as a more open-ended, deliberative process: an exploration of new disciplines of reading, committed to registering familiar markers of sentimental verse not as invitations to unread, but rather as invitations to read with particularly edgy, even anxious, literalizing care." See Lootens, 123.

³² Lootens, 123.

plate. The Aeolian harp poetry I consider underscores the random nature of the instrument itself. However, before turning to the poetry, it is important to first consider the history of the Aeolian harp as an instrument.

Plan of the Dissertation

Chapter one begins with this history, outlining the poetic and critical trajectories of the Aeolian harp and the nightingale, recovering and reviewing a large body of minor and historically neglected poetry. I argue that Aeolian harp poetry works to obscure the source of the sound described –thereby evoking the acousmatic. While the majority of the poems apostrophize the harp, they work to obscure the sound’s source. I suggest that the mode of apostrophe is interrelated with this performance of acousmatic; that is, apostrophe operates in these poems as a marker of acousmaticity. Many of these poems’ performance of the acousmatic involves the occultation of the sound’s source, yet the performance is only discernable by way of the apostrophizing address to that source; that is, we understand apostrophe as an animating force, yet, in the poetry discussed here, apostrophe is what helps the sound’s source to disappear.

Twentieth and twenty-first century scholarship remembers few of these poems, focusing in particular on Coleridge and Thomson³³ with respect to the Aeolian harp, and Keats with respect to the nightingale. However, it is important to remember that Coleridge’s poem “The Eolian Harp” occasionally appeared in the same context as other Aeolian harp poems: the periodicals. For example, it was featured in *The Bouquet: Flowers of Polite Literature* in June of 1832, an American periodical, sandwiched between a brief treatise on women’s education and a paragraph

³³ James Thomson’s “Castle of Indolence” (1748) features a section on the Aeolian harp that is referenced and alluded to again and again in articles about the harp.

on “modesty”: in this late reprinting,³⁴ Coleridge’s poem appears in the context of any other conventional Aeolian harp poem. In other words, the archive of poetry I uncover and discuss in chapter one has implications for the way we consider heavily discussed examples of “high” Romanticism.

I add to my consideration popular images that appeared across a range of publications including pamphlets, periodicals and advertisements. These images further underscore and complicate the tensions and transformations between my two central tropes. My database of Aeolian harp poetry runs from 1748 to 1888, and the majority of the poems were published in the early-to-mid nineteenth century, a roughly fifty-year period, tapering off in the later years of the Victorian period. I also consider the earlier history of my two tropes, and their lives after this time frame in order to highlight the distinctiveness of the interval that I study, a fifty-year span during which these figures were ubiquitous in the periodicals, popular poetry, and song.

Where Chapter One establishes the foundation, the subsequent three chapters offer case studies on the harp and songbird. Chapter Two, “Nature’s Music: Robert Bloomfield and the Aeolian Harp,” concentrates on “peasant poet” and Aeolian harp-maker Robert Bloomfield, and on Bloomfield’s own writing on the harp in order to consider how ideas of music without origin relate to the concept of the “peasant poet” itself. The scholarship on Bloomfield has not taken up the importance of Bloomfield’s second career as an Aeolian harp craftsman. Here, I examine several poems dedicated to Bloomfield and to the harps that he made; I argue that these poems, written largely by Bloomfield’s friends and patrons, work against the characterizations of the peasant poet trope that Bloomfield himself both embraced and resisted. This chapter considers the trope of the “peasant poet” as interrelated with the concept of acousmatic sound (the peasant

³⁴ “Effusion XXXV” was first published in *Poems on Various Subjects* (1796). Coleridge’s revised version, with the altered title of “The Eolian Harp,” appeared in *Sibylline Leaves* in 1817; this version is the one that appears most after that date. See Paul Magnuson, “‘The Eolian Harp’ in Context.” *Studies in Romanticism*. 24.1 (1985): 3-20.

poet was thought to emerge from nature, without “art,” like the nightingale’s song). This chapter shows that the poetry dedicated to Bloomfield, while adhering to the conventions of the Aeolian harp poetry discussed in Chapter One, both underscore the relations between the laboring-class poet and acousmatic sound, and work against that designation by bringing to light Bloomfield’s own labor both as poet and harp maker.

Chapter Three, “Less Written than Dreamed: the Afterlives of Felicia Hemans’s ‘The Nightingale’s Death Song,’” turns attention to Hemans, and to the ways in which her poem, “The Nightingale’s Death Song”(1828) was cycled and recycled through the Victorian era, most often through various musical settings of the poem. Hemans’s poem posits a cyclical, even joyful nightingale, yet, as Hemans herself became associated with the poem after her death, the poem became truncated and excerpted in various periodical reprintings and musical settings. These excerpts and reconfigurations of Hemans’s poem transformed the nightingale trope back to its clichéd, melancholy state: the form in which it particularly appears in the sentimental poetry of the gift annuals, periodicals, and parlor song. So too did Hemans transform, in the later years of the nineteenth century, into the trope of the Poetess, associated with the nightingale’s song. This chapter therefore takes up the performance of the sentimental nightingale cliché, by tracing its resonances and afterlives in one poem and its subsequent revisions and musical settings; here, I show that sound and song are crucial to the trope’s reconfigurations in the later years of the nineteenth century.

Chapter Four, “Acousmatic Sound and the Poetic Songbird Preserved,” picks up where Chapter Three leaves off, exploring the afterlives of the poetic songbird via Victorian bird taxidermy. Just as the Aeolian harp was a fashionable household item earlier in the nineteenth century, and just as the window harp sounded with poetic meaning, so too did the taxidermied

bird resonate with its poetic counterpart: the songbird. In that context, I juxtapose Thomas Hardy's commentary on and address to a taxidermied bird, "In a Museum"(1917), alongside his "end of the century" poem, "The Darkling Thrush"(1900). I argue that the relationship to preserved animals, specifically birds, evokes not only the memory and imagination of song, but that this imagination of sound overlaps with the acousmatic nightingale trope. The difference, I suggest, is that the unseen bird is for the first time made visible—and silent—in taxidermy, reversing its signature phenomenon of invisibility paired with originless sound. This chapter also considers Walter Potter's anthropomorphic taxidermy tableau, "The Original Death and Burial of Cock Robin." Potter's tableau has been much discussed in scholarly literature, yet the poetic resonances of the work, particularly as relates to the acousmatic, and to the ballad and nursery rhyme "The Death and Burial of Cock Robin," have not been addressed. Following a reflection on Keats's nightingale in the context of this dissertation's focus, the acousmatic, chapter four moves from taxidermied birds to the mechanical singing bird at the end of the nineteenth century. The repetitive, wind-up sound of the singing bird box would prefigure the *musique concrète* experiments to come some forty years in the future.

The Coda journeys further beyond this project's largely nineteenth-century horizon to the mid-twentieth century. The term, acousmatic, and its conceptual and aesthetic elaboration, trace to a number of twentieth-century composers and critics, on whom I have drawn in my plotting of this study. In the Coda, I note the odd and fascinating resurfacing of these tropes in several twentieth-century avant-garde compositions: varieties of *musique concrète* and explorations of the Aeolian harp. I close with a discussion of François Bayle's *L'Oiseau Chanteur* (1963), Henry Cowell's piece for piano, *Aeolian Harp* (1923), both of which I set beside musical works of the nineteenth century dedicated to the Aeolian harp.

In sum, “*Aeolian Resonance: Acousmatic Sound in the Nineteenth Century Imagination*” examines the concept of the acousmatic as embodied by two poetic tropes of the nineteenth century, tropes that enjoyed, or suffered, the status of cliché during the period. Through cliché and repetition in Aeolian harp poetry I introduce in Chapter One; the role of acousmatic sound in defining the “peasant poet” (and subverting that characterization) in Chapter Two; the self-correcting nature of the nightingale trope specifically through sound in Chapter Three; and the literal afterlives of poetic songbird in bird taxidermy in Chapter Four, this dissertation uncovers a forgotten archive of poetry about the Aeolian harp, and employs that archive to argue for an integral connection between these tropes’ existence (and dismissal) as commonplaces and a concept of originless sound, one that has implications for our consideration of more canonical works of the Romantic period, as well as our consideration of some avant-gardes of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, whose roots lie, in part, in these “mainstream” nineteenth-century works.

Chapter 1 : Aeolian Resonance

*O! Strange, weird music whence comes it?*¹

Most Musical

The first modern mention of the Aeolian harp is Athanasius Kircher's *Musurgia Universalis* (1650); Kircher called it a "musical autophone."² Kircher's work is especially noteworthy here because of its frontispiece: it portrays a bird holding a music manuscript, which appears as if in the process of unfurling, in its talons [Figure 1.2]. Unlike J.J. Grandville's nightingale, which I discuss in the introduction, this bird, although its beak is very slightly open, does not appear in the act of singing, rather, it looks at the reader as the manuscript unfolds, as if displaying it to us, or inviting us to add notes to the piece, as there appears to be two or perhaps three notes on the staff: the unrolling action reveals that the rest is blank. Here, the bird is displaying the potential for music. The music appears in the process of being written down; the image could also demonstrate a tune midway through. Either way, the unfurling sheet is in motion. This image, like the Grandville drawing, draws our attention to the tensions between natural and human-made musics, and makes visible the reproduction of sound in print culture. While the songbird produces music in the realm of the "natural," the Aeolian harp, while a

¹ Sapis Billiard, "The First Aeolian Harp." *The Irish Times*, Feb 16, 1889.

² Although Stephen Bonner does include a brief mention by Jean-Baptiste Porta in Porta's 1540 *Magica Naturalis*, he notes that those developing harps after Kircher used Kircher's work on the harp as their technical foundation. See Stephen Bonner. *Aeolian Harp: History and Organology*. Cambridge: Bois de Boulogne, 1970: 16; 18.



Figure 1.1: Frontispiece of Athanasius Kircher's *Musurgia Universalis* (1650).³

³ Kircher, Athanasius. *Athanasii Kircheri: Musurgia Vniversalis, Sive Ars Magna Consoni Et Dissoni In X. Libros Digesta*. Romæ: ex typographia hæredum Francisci Corbelletti, 1650.

constructed instrument, in fact lies somewhere in between “natural” and human-made music.

In its most common late-eighteenth and nineteenth-century form, the Aeolian harp was a long, rectangular box with strings attached at each end, with sound holes, placed in an open window for the breeze to activate the strings. Stephen Bonner documents the Aeolian harp’s pre-modern (pre-Kircher) existence in legend, describing two different stages.⁴ In the first stage, “wind is discovered making music on dried animal entrails or sinews, and hence a stringed instrument such as the lute or lyre is invented.” The second stage is more mystical, as it involves a “God-derived wind” that “blows on an already-invented musical instrument, such as the harp.”⁵ Bonner’s retelling moves us from the invention of musical instruments themselves to a way of accounting for sounds that emerge, without human contact, from an already-invented instrument. In the first stage, sound and music are free of human manufacture, existing as potential for the instrument’s invention; in the second, the wind has a godly source to account for its originlessness.

Aeolian harps gained popularity in eighteenth century, spurred on, as Bonner argues, not by Kircher’s work *per se* (though it was fundamental in the harp’s technological development), but by the poets. James Thomson famously wrote about the Aeolian harp in his 1748 “Castle of Indolence,” which was still heavily referenced in nineteenth-century writing on the harp. From the mid-eighteenth century onwards, the Aeolian harp became extremely popular as a domestic object, and as a poetic image. Writing in 1930, Erika von Erhardt-Siebold calls the Aeolian harp

⁴ Bonner wrote and edited the 1970 *Aeolian Harp Series*, a four-volume series with a supplemental volume of plates covering the history, organology, construction methods, acoustics and sound of the Aeolian harp. The small volumes are limited edition and hand-numbered, and published by the small press, Bois de Boulogne. The series itself is mostly descriptive. Published almost fifty years ago, it remains the most thorough history of the instrument I have found.

⁵ Bonner, 15.

the “Radio of the Romantics,” noting, with a touch of nostalgia, that it “was found in almost every home where music and poetry were cherished.”⁶ Bonner maintains, however, that the harp was a luxury item: “the Aeolian harp was until [the twentieth] century mainly used by aristocrats in royal houses, gardens, grottos, and parks.”⁷ Yet the harp may have been more accessible to middle-class homes than Bonner recognizes, as an abundance of do-it-yourself Aeolian harp construction articles appeared in the periodicals and magazines aimed at young people, especially in the later years of the nineteenth century, allowing those inclined to make their own window harp at a fraction of the cost.⁸ However, if one had the financial resources, purchasing a ready-made harp from an instrument-maker was much more convenient.

Instrument-makers also turned to poetry to advertise their Aeolian harps: poetry was a crucial accompaniment to harp ownership, and harp appreciation generally. The volume of harp poems, many of which detail a scene of listening, are dedicated to a harp, or accompany a harp given as a gift, testify to this. The harp-makers contributed to the popularity and volume of poetry, then, in the course of their methods of advertising. In an engraving from one of these advertising pamphlets, a gentleman stands next to a table on top of which lies an Aeolian harp [Figure 1.3]. The man gestures towards the open space of a window that is slightly ajar, as if showing us where the harp should be placed. In front of the harp sits a small object, most likely a tool used for tuning:

⁶ See Erika von Erhardt-Siebold. “Some Inventions of the Pre-Romantic Period and their Influence Upon Literature.” *Englische Studien* 1931/32: 357.

⁷ I discuss issues of class as relates to the harp and particularly the harp-making of “peasant” poet Robert Bloomfield in greater depth in Chapter Two. See also Bonner, *History and Organology*: 20.

⁸ For example, “To Make an Aeolian Harp.” *Weekly Irish Times (1876-1920)*: 1. Jun 10 1899. *ProQuest*. Web. 21 May 2016.; “How to make an Eolian Harp.” *Zion's Herald*, 71:17 (Apr 26, 1893):130.; “The Aeolian Harp.” *Home Journal*, 25: 436 (Jun 17, 1854);1.



Figure 1.2: Frontispiece of Henry Thorowgood's *Description of the Aeolian-Harp, or Harp of Aeolus* (1754).

Appearing as the frontispiece for instrument-maker Henry Thorowgood's pamphlet *A Description of the Æolian-harp, or Harp of Æolus* (1754), this gentleman is likely a depiction of the author himself.⁹ Because the harp is not yet placed in the windowsill, this image highlights an essential characteristic of the Aeolian harp: it is an instrument of potential. Therefore this image--like the Kircher frontispiece--makes potential music visible. Additionally, while the majority of Thorowgood's pamphlet will focus on the harp as poetic image, this engraving foregrounds the constructedness of an actual harp, displaying both an instructional scene by showing where to place your harp, and reminding the reader that it must be tuned, like any other stringed instrument: the unseen hand of "Nature" may play its music upon the harp, but humans still need to provide the appropriate adjustments.

In this way, Thorowgood's frontispiece also highlights the tensions between human-made and natural musics discussed elsewhere in this dissertation in the Grandville and Kircher engravings (e.g. the harp must be built by humans, yet it is almost universally characterized as a device that produces the music of nature).

After providing this instructional scenario, Thorowgood's pamphlet turns to a selection of quotes on the subject of the harp and connects the Aeolian harp to poetry,¹⁰ for example, the anonymous verse Thorowgood attributes to the April 1754 volume of *The Gentleman's Magazine*, "Inscription on an Aeolian Harp":

Hail heav'nly Harp, where Memnon's¹¹ skill is shown

⁹ Henry Thorowgood. *A Description of the Æolian-harp, Or Harp of Æolus From the Earliest Account to the Present Time, ... Which Are Made On the Truest Mechanical Principles by Henry Thorowgood Musical Instrument Maker*. London: printed for H. Thorowgood, 1754.

¹⁰ Something artisan poet and Aeolian harp-maker Robert Bloomfield will do fifty-four years later in his 1808 pamphlet, *Nature's Music*. I discuss Bloomfield, his pamphlet, his poetry, and his Aeolian harp business at length in chapter two.

¹¹ A reference to the Colossi of Memnon, one of the statues of which was legendarily known to intermittently produce an eerie sound (likely from the wind blowing through the broken statue). Robin Dix argues that an error in a ninth-century description of the Colossus of Memnon (that the statue held a lute), reprinted through the eighteenth

That charm'st the Ear with Music, all thy own!
 Which, tho' untouch'd, can'st rapt'rous Charms impart,
 Of rich, of genuine Nature, free from Art!
 Such the wild Warblings of the chirping Throng,
 So simply Sweet the untaught Virgin's Song.¹²

The poem compares the Aeolian harp to songbirds and “untaught” song, characterizing its sound as “genuine Nature” “free from art.” The harp, like birdsong, seemingly sounds without any human influence. “Inscription” additionally compares the harp to birdsong (“wild Warblings of the chirping Throng”). The title, indicating the poem is an “inscription on” a harp, foregrounds, in one sense, the harp as an object on which (or to which) a poem can potentially be inscribed. For Thorowgood, advertisement for his instrument business is clearly a motive, yet his pamphlet (and Kircher’s engraving discussed above) also demonstrates that the sound of the Aeolian harp and the sound of birdsong were connected from the harp’s modern beginnings as a novel domestic instrument.

While the Aeolian harp was ubiquitous in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it fell out of popularity as the nineteenth century came to a close, as other, newer sound technologies gained more traction, and the sentimental style of its poetry fell out of fashion. According to Bonner, acoustician E.G. Richardson calls the harp a “children’s toy” in 1920.¹³ A similar sentiment appears in the work of Geoffrey Grigson, writing on the harp twenty-seven years later. The Aeolian harp’s ubiquity paved the way for its obsolescence, and what was once a

century, “exercised considerable influence upon the Romantic interpretation of the Aeolian harp”—notably though Mark Akenside’s *The Pleasures of Imagination* (1744). Dix argues Akenside’s poem links Memnon to the harp and imagination, in ways that Dix claims influenced Coleridge and Wordsworth. See Robin Dix. “The Harps of Memnon and Aeolus: A Study in the Propagation of an Error.” *Modern Philology*, 85:3 (1988): 289; 290. See also Ryan McCormack. “The Colossus of Memnon and Phonography.” *Sound Studies*, 2:2 (2016): 165-187.

¹² Thorowgood, 2; 20.

¹³ Bonner. *History and Organology*: 20.

household term and revered object became a footnote at the end of the nineteenth century. It would be decades before mid-twentieth-century critics, such as M.H. Abrams, revived and cemented it as one of Romanticism's central figures. Even then, poems like "Inscription on an Aeolian Harp" were largely forgotten, although as I will now discuss, this poem is typical of a large amount of sentimental poetry dedicated to the harp in its address to the harp, its praise of the harp as "free from art," and its connection of the harp to birdsong through the word "warblings."

Wild Warblings

*But, O sad Virgin, that thy power
Might raise Musæus from his bower,
Or bid the soul of Orpheus sing
Such notes as warbled to the string
--Milton¹⁴*

Much Aeolian harp poetry is strikingly similar, with many apostrophizing the harp in opening lines such as:

Minstrel of nature! when thy song/ Seem'd breathing from some heavenly/ sphere¹⁵

Oh! it is sweet to hear thy silver sound¹⁶

Harp of the Zephyr! whose least breath, o'er

Thy tender string moving, is felt by thee.¹⁷

¹⁴ John Milton. "Il Penseroso." 46-52.

¹⁵ "To the Aeolian Harp." *New-York Weekly Museum* 5.13 (1817): 204

¹⁶ J.E. "Sonnet on Hearing an Aeolian Harp Play." *Newcastle Magazine* 7.5 (1828): 214

¹⁷ B. "To the Æolian Harp." *European Magazine, and London Review*. 84 (1823): 432.

Sweet harp, as onward flow'd thy plaintive strains.¹⁸

The last two opening lines mention the harp outright, while the first two are more ambiguous—we need the titles (which are in this case, and many others, “To the Aeolian Harp”(1817) and “Sonnet on Hearing an Aeolian Harp Play”(1828), respectively) to know instantly that the “minstrel of nature,” for example, is the Aeolian harp, and not that other minstrel of nature, the nightingale. On the other hand, the latter two opening lines mentioned here would not have needed the preceding title (here, similarly, “To the Aeolian Harp”(1823) and “Sonnet. To an Aeolian Harp”(1824)) for readers in the 1820s to recognize the subject as that of the wind harp. These similar titles would have likely let readers know instantly what kind of poem was to follow: a typically brief, often apostrophic, sentimental encomium to the harp. The poems also commonly describe a scene of listening, a remembered scene of listening, or the desire to hear the harp’s sounds, and sometimes all three.¹⁹

The poems often refer to the harp in terms of the invisible air or wind, and these repetitive characterizations of the harp across the poetry become epithet-like:

Harp of the viewless air²⁰

Hail to thee! minstrel of the viewless/ air!²¹

Why is there sadness in thy changing tone,/ Harp of the viewless air?²²

Aeolian harp poetry also repeats encomiums to an “unseen hand” which plays upon the strings—a phrase that appears in at least nine Aeolian harp poems. For example, the 1830 *Ladies*

¹⁸ Mag., Sel. “Sonnet. To an Aeolian Harp.” *The Atheneum; or, Spirit of the English Magazines* 1.4 (1824): 147.

¹⁹ This speaks to the majority of the poems, as with any large sample, there are outliers; here, these consist of longer poems, poems with specifically religious themes, and dramatic narratives.

²⁰ X. “Stanzas, Suggested by the Melody of an Aeolian Harp.” *The American Monthly Magazine* 1.4 (1833: June): 202.

²¹ W.M. “To the Aeolian Harp.” *Universal Magazine* 10.57 (1808): 146.

²² A—E. “Aeolian Harp.” *Ladies’ Magazine and Literary Gazette* 3.9 (1830): 393

Magazine poem by “A—E” mentioned above that opens with “Why is there sadness in thy changing tone, / Harp of the viewless air?” continues with “Oh, is that melting melody *thine own*?/ Where’s the unseen hand? Where?”²³ This invisible, unseen, “viewless” aspect is crucial to appreciation of the harp, and is a key feature in the poetry. As discussed earlier in this chapter, with respect to Kane’s suggestion that knowing the means of a sound’s production potentially reduces the sound’s acousmaticity, the poetry I discuss here induces, and invokes, acousmaticity by underscoring the invisible.

The poems also induce the acousmatic by way of rhetorical questions about the sound’s origins. Certainly, judging by the titles above alone, the Aeolian harp is the known cause of the music described in the poetry. Yet many attempt to reproduce the acousmatic, and sometimes, otherworldliness of the sound, in lines such as the aforementioned that inquires, “Where’s the unseen hand? Where?” The repetition of “where” stresses the unknown, unseen origin of the sound. Lines such as the following create an acousmatic scene of listening by purporting to question what we already know: that the sound arises from the wind’s action on the strings of the harp:

I thought a heavenly host descended,
And bore their music from the sky²⁴

Thou hast no note of earthly sound, or spell²⁵

What light sylph, or wandering fairy,
Sweeps the notes of Melody!²⁶

²³ A—E. “Aeolian Harp.” *Ladies’ Magazine and Literary Gazette* 3.9 (1830): 393

²⁴ A.C. “On an Aeolian Harp.” *Imperial Magazine* 7.83 (1825): 37

²⁵ A—E. “Aeolian Harp.” *Ladies’ Magazine and Literary Gazette* 3.9 (1830): 393

Say: whence these sounds that please mine ear?

These breathing pow'rs that round me float?²⁷

These questions, in addition to the emphasis on invisibility, create a listening event that relies on the invocation of the acousmatic: the harp's (and the nightingale's) purported mystery and magic is due in large part to these characteristics. Recalling Kane, acousmatic listening depends on the mindset of the listener, not, ultimately, on the sound.²⁸ By posing these types of questions and stressing the invisible, the poems attempt to mimic the actual scene of listening to an Aeolian harp: even while apostrophizing and praising the harp, they attempt to obscure the actual source of the sound.²⁹

The examples discussed above are drawn from poems in a database I have compiled consisting of all the Aeolian harp poems I have found to date (see image below), in both British and American publications (the vast majority are periodicals), dating from 1748 to 1888. When viewed this way, the similarities across the poems, via the titles, comes to the fore. Because the bulk of these poems are found in the periodicals, many of the authors use pseudonyms, or remain anonymous. The poems also share a few themes in common, the most common of which is the above-mentioned "unseen hand" that plays upon the harp. Other themes include melancholy emotions (another area of overlap with nightingale poetry); the rise and fall of the harp's notes as corresponding with the wax and wane of emotion in the listener (or, sometimes *causing* the

²⁶ "Aeolian Harp, The." *The Juvenile Port-Folio, and Literary Miscellany; Devoted to the Instruction and Amusement of Youth* 1.18 (1813): 72

²⁷ J-A, B-WD-N. "Stanzas, on Hearing an Aeolian Harp." *European Magazine, and London Review*. 45 (1804): 300.

²⁸ Kane, 225.

²⁹ Related to this phenomenon are what Elizabeth Helsinger calls "song poems," though Helsinger is focusing on the human, she argues: "in song poems scenes of listening and singing often introduce these lyrics or feature prominently in them, as if to encourage the reader to listen to the (silent) sound of reading and consider the delicate, shifting relations between thinking and verbal embodiment in the event of a poem." See Elizabeth. K. Helsinger. *Poetry and the Thought of Song in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015: 6.

fluctuation of emotion); the harp's sounds sometimes act as a soothing remedy for melancholy, almost as a mood balancer. A certain common vocabulary appears across the poems, as discussed above with respect to "viewless." The most recurrent here is the word "warble" used as both a noun and a verb. Below are samples of the database: an Excel spreadsheet, an Excel pivot table that organizes the poems by titles>dates>themes, and a cluster dendrogram organized by dates>titles>themes:

1792	"Ode to the Eolian Harp"	Anon	Universal Magazine	UK	Birdsong
1793	"Sonnet to an Aeolian Harp"	Calista	The New York Magazine	Am	Calming
1797	"Casimer's Ode to the Eolian Harp"	Casimer	Universal Magazine	UK	Warble
1804	"Stanzas, on Hearing an Aeolian Harp"	J-A, B-WD-N	European Magazine, and London Review	UK	Contending Passions
1804	"Aeolian Harp"	Mortimer	Walker's Hibernian Magazine	Ir	Warble
1804	"On the Eolian Harp"	B.F.	The Monthly Magazine	UK	Melancholy
1805	"The Aeolian Harp"	Anon	The Port-Folio	Am	Birdsong
1805	"To an Eolian Harp"	Pascal, J.	Weekly Entertainer	UK	Calming
1807	"The Eolian Harp"	Barrett, Rosa	Lady's Monthly Museum	UK	Unseen Hand
1807	"Impromptu, on being Presented with an Aeolian Harp"	M.D.	The Monthly Magazine	UK	Bloomfield
1808	"Sonnet VIII. On Hearing the Sound of the Aeolian Harp"	White, Henry	The Remains of Henry Kirke White	UK	Melancholy
1808	"To the Aeolian Harp"	W.M.	Universal Magazine	Am	Calming
1813	"The Aeolian Harp"	Anon	The Juvenile Port-Folio, and Literary Miscellany; Devoted to the Amusement and Improvement of the Young	Am	Unseen Hand
1814	"The Aeolian Harp"	Anon	The Gentleman's Magazine	UK	Love
1814	"To the Aeolian Harp"	Lacey, J.M.	Lady's Monthly Museum	UK	
1814	"The Eolian Harp"	Dacre, S.	Monthly Museum: or, Dublin Literary Repository	Ir	Unseen Hand
1815	"The Aeolian Harp"	Mortimer	The Intellectual Regale; or, Ladies' Tea Tray	Am	Warble
1816	"The Aeolian Harp"	Anon	The Weekly Entertainer	UK	Warble
1816	"The Eolian Harp"	Anon	The Juvenile Port-Folio, and Literary Miscellany; Devoted to the Amusement and Improvement of the Young	Am	Melancholy
1817	"To the Aeolian Harp"	Anon	New-York Weekly Museum	Am	Heavenly spirit
1817	"The Eolian Harp"	Anon	New-York Weekly Museum	Am	immortality
1817	"To the Eolian Harp"	R.H.	British Lady's Magazine	UK	Calming
1819	"The Aeolian Harp"	A	Kaleidoscope; or, Literary and Scientific Mirror	UK	
1821	"Aeolian Harp"	Anon	Kaleidoscope; or, Literary and Scientific Mirror	UK	
1821	"The Fall of the Leaf, Addressed to the Aeolian Harp"	A.H.	The Ladies' Literary Cabinet	UK	Birdsong
1823	"To the Aeolian Harp"	B	European Magazine, and London Review	UK	Melancholy
1823	"The Eolian Harp"	Sigma	The New-York Mirror	Am	Unseen Hand
1824	"Sonnet to an Aeolian Harp"	Mag., Sel.	The Atheneum	UK	Unseen Hand
1824	"Extemporary Lines on Hearing the Sound of the Aeolian Harp"	R.	European Magazine, and London Review	UK	fairies
1825	"On an Aeolian Harp"	A.C.	Imperial Magazine	UK	Imagination
1825	"To the Aeolian Harp"	Anon	The Atheneum	UK	Bard
1826	"The Eolian Harp"	Cornelia	The Album and Ladies' Weekly Gazette	Am	object

Figure 1.3: Excerpt from Aeolian harp poetry database.

▼ 1808	2
▼ "Sonnet VIII. On Hearing the Sounds of an Aeolian Harp"	1
Melancholy	1
▼ "To the Aeolian Harp"	1
Calming	1
▼ 1811	
▼ "Stanzas Written under Aeolus's Harp"	
(blank)	
▼ 1813	1
▼ "The Aeolian Harp"	1
Unseen Hand	1
▼ 1814	2
▼ "The Aeolian Harp"	1
Love	1
▼ "The Eolian Harp"	1
Unseen Hand	1
▼ "To the Aeolian Harp"	
(blank)	
▼ 1815	1
▼ The Aeolian Harp"	1
Warble	1
▼ 1816	2
▼ "The Aeolian Harp"	1
Warble	1
▼ "The Eolian Harp"	1
Melancholy	1

Figure 1.4: Excerpt from pivot table showing dates>themes.

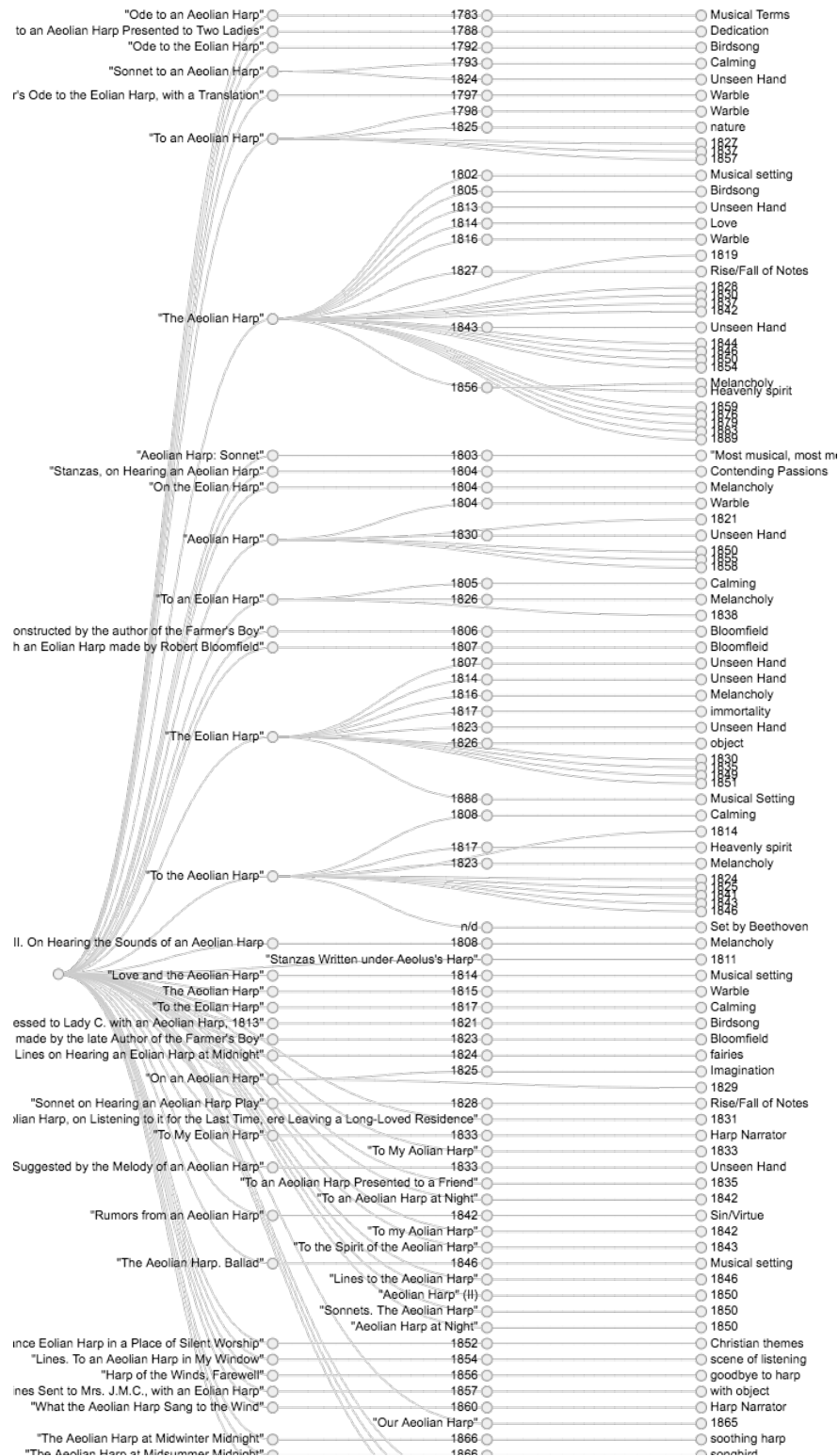


Figure 1.5: Cluster dendrogram showing the poems organized by titles>dates>themes.

Each of these tables shows a segment of the list in a slightly different light. The spreadsheet provides a sense of the large volume of poems by year, whereas the pivot table helps track the major, similar themes across the poems. The cluster dendrogram provides a visual representation of how many poems share the same (or similar) titles, the most common, not surprisingly, is “The Aeolian Harp.” As I discuss above, these poems trade in similar epithets for the harp and its sounds, share similar titles, and are found in similar publications: periodicals and gift annuals. These tables have helped organize this archive and track themes, titles, dates, and publications, and provide an overview of Aeolian harp poems, the majority of which have remained unexamined in the scholarship. For example, the Aeolian harp poems by an author named simply, “Mortimer.”

Mortimer authored an 1803 article and poem, “Aeolian Harp,” published in the American periodical *The Monthly Anthology, and Boston Review*. In the article, Mortimer refers to the harp as “the ‘most musical, most melancholy,’ and bewitching of all melodies,” employing Milton’s words here in praise of the harp and not the nightingale.³⁰ A poem follows the brief article, “Aeolian Harp. Sonnet.” In apostrophizing the harp’s music, evoking Sylphs and pleasing melancholy, describing the rise and fall of the harp’s tones, and in its standard title, “Aeolian Harp. Sonnet”—like “Inscription on an Aeolian Harp” from Thorowgood’s pamphlet—is a representative example of much Aeolian harp poetry. This poem further strengthens the connection between the harp and nightingale advanced in the author’s use of “most musical, most melancholy.” The poem in full reads:

Music of nature! Emblem of each sphere!

³⁰ Mortimer. “Aeolian Harp: Sonnet.” *The Monthly Anthology, and Boston Review*. Nov 1, 1803; 1,1: 29. It also appeared the following year in the Irish periodical, *Walker’s Hibernian magazine, or, Compendium of entertaining knowledge*. Dublin: Printed by R. Gibson, 17 -1811.

How sweetly tranquil does my pensive soul,
At coming eve, thy warbling murmurs hear,
When sooth'd to tenderness thy measures roll
Sometimes more loud, and now yet louder still;
Sometimes more defiant, and again more near;
Waking soft echoes, and with magic skill,
Swelling the eye with a luxurious tear.
Delightful flutterings! hov'ring mid the sky,
Mildly reluctant, on wild pinions borne
To realms of Sylphs, that on your murmurs fly,
And, wak'd to melancholy feelings, mourn.
Sweet, pensive melody! ethereal strain,
Ah! still aspire to sooth each rising pain.

The harp's music is here described as "warbling murmurs," whose "flutterings" hover and are borne on "wild pinions": not only does this sonnet evoke bird song, but bird wings and bird flight.

"Mortimer" published another Aeolian harp poem in 1815, which opens,

Plaintive warbler wild and airy,
What rude minstrel of the sky,
What light sylph or wandering fairy,
Tunes the notes of melody?³¹

If the title did not indicate that this poem's subject was the wind harp, this opening could refer to

³¹ Mortimer. "The Aeolian Harp." *The Intellectual Regale; or, Ladies' Tea Tray* 2.4 (1815): 477.

the songbird. Instead, the Aeolian harp is the “warbler,” but where did this word come from? The earliest appearance of the word “warble” was as a noun, meaning “a tune or melody...performed on an instrument or sung.” Only subsequently did “warble” become a verb (sometime in the fifteenth century), as it came to mean the action of “gentle and melodious singing” particularly associated with birds, or singing after the fashion of birds. Warble as a verb means “to sound in quavering, flexible melody; to be produced with free smooth, and rapid modulations of pitch (this is a now obsolete meaning, but may have been in use during the time of the earlier poems). Warble can also mean “Of a small stream: to make melody as it flows. Also of the wind.”³² A “warbler” is a type of bird, recognizable by song. Music, the wind, and birdsong specifically, are all contained in the word “warble.” “Warble” itself, as a noun, became activated in its transition to verb.

George Goodwin’s 1798 “To the Æolian Harp” also connects the harp and the songbird through warbling. The poem opens:

Most pleasant warble thy wild-flowing notes,
Sweet simple instrument! —Oh! I cou’d pause
Beneath some thick-wove canopy of elms,
To hear thy music, e’en from morn, —till night
Shou’d spread her thickest veil. Ah then ’tis sweet,
To hear thy soft-sighs melancholly [*sic*] breathe,
As the wild zephyr flutters o’er thy strings,

³² "warble, n.1."; "warble, n.2."; "warble, n.3."; "warble, v.1."; "warble, v.2."; "warble, v.3."; "warble, v.4." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, January 2018, www.oed.com/view/Entry/225600. Accessed 13 March 2018.

On silken pinions.—³³

A “pleasant warble” leads the narrator to speculate about pausing beneath the trees to listen, a spot where one would also hear birdsong. The emphasis on night as the sweetest time to hear the harp’s melancholy sounds also reflects nightingale poetry, as the bird was thought at the time to sing only under cover of night. The harp’s sounds are most desirable when made invisible by the night; this poem, too, presents an acousmatic way of listening, and, importantly, links this mode of listening to both the harp and the songbird.

As I discuss above, the nightingale was already overdetermined as a figure two hundred years before the poetry considered here; the nightingale’s characteristics were well-known-- it, too, was ubiquitous in the poetry of the periodicals. Nightingale poetry, like Aeolian harp poetry, invokes and induces acousmatic listening (as in the example from Milton with which this chapter opened); though the figure is based partly on mythology, it relies on sound as crucial to its meanings in the poetry.

Most Melancholy

That the nightingale operates as a placeholder for melancholy in sentimental poetry is no revelation. Yet, the nightingale is also a complex figure, with a long and tangled history. The Western poetic nightingale has two primary historical strains: medieval and classical. In the medieval version, the nightingale is male and is associated with eroticism, spring, sexual awakening, and this nightingale sings in the daytime. Jeni Williams argues that this medieval version of the poetic nightingale “interacts directly with the human world, encouraging lovers

³³ George Goodwin. “To the Aeolian Harp. *“Rising castle, with other poems.* By George Goodwin. Lynn : printed for the author by W. Turner; and sold by all the booksellers in Lynn; Messrs. Robinson, London; Stevenson and Matchett, Norwich; and Gedge, Bury, 1798.

and sometimes acting as a confidant,”³⁴ and that “[a]s a vigorous daytime singer, a male bird which actively interacts with the human world, the nightingale of oral verse is almost a mirror image of the lamenting Philomela.”³⁵

The myth of Philomela, that is, the classical strain of the nightingale figure, is one that may be more familiar to readers in the twenty-first century, and was certainly more familiar to readers in the nineteenth. The myth of Philomela and Procne, briefly, is as follows: Procne’s husband Tereus rapes Procne’s sister Philomela. In order to keep Philomela silent about the crime, Tereus cuts out her tongue and locks her away, telling Procne that Philomela has died.³⁶ Meanwhile, the still alive but tongueless Philomela weaves the story of the crime into a tapestry which she then shows Procne. Philomela and Procne then kill Procne and Tereus’s son Itys, and serve him to Tereus for dinner as revenge. When Tereus then tries to murder the two women with an axe, Zeus steps in and turns them all into birds, transforming Procne into a swallow³⁷ and Philomela into a nightingale.³⁸

It is this classical, western mythological strain that shows more lasting power with respect to sentimental poetry in the nineteenth century. This is not to completely discount the medieval strain, yet, the nightingale that appears again and again in periodical and gift-annual poetry is overwhelmingly the melancholy, female nightingale who sings unseen and at night, and does not interact directly with the poems’s characters. Williams again:

³⁴ Jeni Williams. *Interpreting Nightingales*: 12. Williams’s monograph is an interpretation of the nightingale figure with respect primarily to gender, but Williams also provides an excellent history of the poetic nightingale from classical mythology to the Victorian era.

³⁵ Williams, 36.

³⁶ Helsinger argues, “the more serious risk for a poet in pursuit of Philomela’s music is the loss of tongue and with it humanness: rape and mutilation are the condition of her song,” in reference to Keats’s ode, often the most discussed—along with Milton—with respect to the literary nightingale. See Helsinger, *Poetry and the Thought of Song in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, 25.

³⁷ Yet in other versions it is *Procne* who becomes the nightingale and *Philomela* who becomes the swallow. Williams notes, “The confusion of identity is reflected in the metamorphoses: in Greek stories generally the nightingale and swallow are often confused with each other.” Williams, 20.

³⁸ Tereus becomes a hoopoe and Itys becomes a goldfinch. Williams, 16.

The nightingale also invokes the sentimental poetry that filled the popular journals from the mid-eighteenth century, and well into the nineteenth. In those poems the nightingale functions as a shorthand signifier of ‘poetic’ melancholy: a self-reflective cipher for the preoccupation with sentiment and surface.³⁹

Indeed. And Williams’s insistence that “the richness of the nightingale’s song is an insufficient reason for the bird’s continuing popularity in literature” is certainly correct: the nightingale’s song is not the reason for the bird’s longevity (and in nineteenth-century poetry, ubiquity). However, in my consideration of the nightingale, the idea and imagination of its song does lie behind its functioning as a popular poetic trope. While I have noted that the figure has a complex history, this project focus on how song and sound inflect the ways this trope appeared and metamorphosed through the nineteenth century.⁴⁰ Additionally, I link the longevity and ubiquity of the trope with cliché and repetition. While the nightingale’s song is not the cause of its longevity, the idea of its song and sound is integral to how the trope manifested in popular poetry. The Aeolian harp, too, as it continued to appear as a hackneyed poetic figure, seemed to rely less on *its* actual song, and more on the idea of its sound, and the invocation of a particular scene of listening, for its tenacious grip on the poetry of the periodicals. Yet, its sounds, like the nightingale’s, and the imagined scenes of listening that accompany them, are what subtend its functioning as a sentimental cliché. These sounds—and importantly, the imagination of their acousmatic characteristics--have largely been ignored in scholarship in favor of a focus solely on the meanings surrounding the poetic tropes, and almost always on the “major” authors in a poetic canon established in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

A similar database could no doubt be constructed using nightingale poems, though this

³⁹ Williams, 143.

⁴⁰ I focus particularly on the metamorphoses of the nightingale trope in Chapter Three.

trope and its poetry are much more well-known than the archive of poetry about the Aeolian harp I present here, which is better served by such organization. What we know about the nightingale stems from many sources, as the figure is still in use today; what we know about the Aeolian harp rests largely on twentieth century scholarship, which canonized it along with the other “major” authors of the Romantic period. I will now turn to a brief history of this scholarship, showing the trajectories of the Aeolian harp and the nightingale in the twentieth century.

Bad Poems

Geoffrey Grigson opens his 1947 essay, “The Harp of Aeolus” with this statement: “This is less the story of an instrument than of an image.” The instrument, he writes, “became a universal toy in the music shops and the window casements,” while the image became “a repeated image in poetry and the subject for poems. Lightly used images, for the most part, and bad poems.”⁴¹ For Grigson, Coleridge and Wordsworth are the only poets who wrote anything of merit about the Aeolian harp (and “perhaps,” he suggests, “Shelley and De Quincey”). Grigson’s focus on the image, and his consideration of canonical Romantics Coleridge and Wordsworth, to the exclusion (and out-of-hand dismissal) of numerous “minor” authors who also wrote Aeolian harp poetry is not surprising of mid-twentieth-century criticism broadly, but it is also more specifically typical of the body of criticism devoted to the Aeolian harp. Grigson’s conception of the instrument as an “agreeable toy” has remained with us; the vast amount of “bad poems” he brushed aside with one sentence have, for the most part, remained where they were: buried and unsounded in the periodicals. Critics since Grigson have focused on the harp as poetic figure, one crucial to understanding the Romantic ethos. The story of Aeolian harp

⁴¹ Geoffrey Grigson. *The Harp of Aeolus and Other Essays on Art, Literature & Nature*. London: Routledge, 1948: 24, 29.

criticism is therefore also the story of an image, not the story of an instrument.

Without doubt the most influential work on the subject of the harp remains that of M.H. Abrams. Writing six years after Grigson, he argues in *The Mirror and the Lamp* (1953), that “[t]he Aeolian lyre is the poet, and the poem is the chord of music which results from the reciprocation of external and internal elements, of both the changing wind and the constitution and tension of the strings.”⁴² Abrams develops this line of thinking further in “The Correspondent Breeze”(1957):

The rising wind, usually linked with the outer transition from winter to spring, serves as the vehicle for a complex subjective event: the return to a sense of community after isolation, the renewal of life and emotional vigor after apathy and spiritual torpor, and an outburst of creative inspiration following a period of sterility.⁴³

For Abrams, the harp is a figure for the poet’s mind, allowing the poet to cast the mind out into nature, and then reel it back in, crucially changed as a result of its interaction with the exterior world. The harp is associated with creativity, sensitivity, spontaneity, and receptiveness of the mind and emotions to nature specifically. While I will discuss some dissenting opinions, these interpretations on the Aeolian harp and the wind in Romantic poetry are still the standard.

It is not for nothing that Abrams associates the harp with these characteristics: some Romantic writers certainly did express these sentiments, and as Jerome McGann tells us, “[e]ighteenth-century discourse of sensibility seized the eolian harp [*sic*] as a non-conscious tool for revealing the vital correspondences that pour through the material world.”⁴⁴ McGann widens the scope of study far beyond the Romantic “big six” (and Grigson’s “big two,” possibly four)

⁴² M.H Abrams. *The Mirror And the Lamp: Romantic Theory And the Critical Tradition*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1953: 51. This is another reverberation of Shelley’s “Defence of Poetry.”

⁴³ M.H Abrams. “The Correspondent Breeze: A Romantic Metaphor.” *The Kenyon Review* 19.1 (1957): 113-114.

⁴⁴ Jerome McGann. *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996: 21.

yet still applies the Abrams model to his Aeolian harp study, which focuses on Coleridge's "The Eolian Harp" (or, "Effusion XXXV," arguably the most studied of all Aeolian harp poems).⁴⁵

More recently, Timothy Morton has reconfigured the Aeolian harp figure, particularly in Coleridge's poem, via an object-oriented ontological approach. Instead of pondering the figure or symbol of the harp within Coleridge's poem, Morton argues that the entire poem operates as a wind harp, one that generates what he calls an "ambient poetics,"⁴⁶ whereby, "[s]ounds emitted by the harp stretch the idea of the object to include the environment itself."⁴⁷ Morton's positing of a mind embedded in and penetrated by the environment, and his posit of the harp's sound stretching to connect internal and external realities is not at first glance so radically different than some of Abrams' ideas. However, Morton links sound here with an all-encompassing material reality, one that supports his theory of "ecology without nature."⁴⁸ For Morton, then, the harp isn't a figure that links the poet's mind with an exterior world (mind *plus* world); the harp and the mind *are* the world (world-mind), that is, a single composite system or entity.

⁴⁵ See, for example: Paul Cheshire. "The Eolian Harp." *Coleridge Bulletin: The Journal of the Friends of Coleridge* 17 (2001): 1-26; James H. Averill. "Coleridge's 'the Eolian Harp' and James Thomson's 'an Ode on Aeolus's Harp'." *English Language Notes* 16 (1979): 223-7; Albert Gérard. "The Systolic Rhythm: The Structure of Coleridge's Conversation Poems." *Essays in Criticism* 10 (1960): 307-19; Paul Magnuson. "'The Eolian Harp' in Context." *Studies in Romanticism* 24.1 (1985): 3-20; Henry J. W. Milley. "Some Notes on Coleridge's 'Eolian Harp'." *Modern Philology: A Journal Devoted to Research in Medieval and Modern Literature* 36.4 (1939): 359-75; Michael Raiger. "The Intellectual Breeze, the Corporeality of Thought, and the Eolian Harp." *Coleridge Bulletin: The Journal of the Friends of Coleridge* 20 (2002): 76-84; Jill Rubenstein. "Sound and Silence in Coleridge's Conversation Poems." *English: The Journal of the English Association* 21 (1972): 54-60.

⁴⁶ I agree with Morton when he links this type of "ambience" with twentieth-century artists such as Yoko Ono, LaMonte Young and John Cage. We diverge where Morton goes on to discuss the harp's sounds with respect to his environmental applications of OOO philosophy. While Morton is convincing (and his reading of Coleridge's poem is intriguing) in this respect, I am interested, in this chapter, in the harp (and nightingale) figures appearing as examples of acousmatic scenes of listening (ones that absolutely prefigured avant-garde musics by the likes of Young, Cage, Ono et al; and I would also add Pierre Schaeffer, François Bayle, Iannis Xenakis, and countless works of "New Age" music of the 1970s and 80s), and the ways popular, periodical, "mainstream" poetry was a crucial site for this type of listening and conception of sound. Timothy Morton. "Of Matter and Meter: Environmental Form in Coleridge's 'Effusion 35' and 'The Eolian Harp,'" *Literature Compass* 5.2 (2008): 312.

⁴⁷ Morton, 314. See also Timothy Morton. "An Object-Oriented Defense of Poetry." *NLH*: 23.2 (2012): 205-224. Here, Morton inverts Shelley's claim in *The Defence* that humans are Aeolian harps: Morton argues, "Wind harps are like sentient beings" in that "Sentience... is vibrating in tune with (or out of tune with) some other entity: sentience is attunement" According to Morton, the Aeolian harp is a "beautifully elegant example of aesthetics as causality": 205-206.

⁴⁸ Morton suggests the conception of a separate 'nature' that we preserve and save actually hinders effective environmental efforts. See Morton, Timothy. *Ecology Without Nature*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007.

Morton is one of the few critics to discuss the harp *as* instrument, including sound in his analysis. Another is Susan Bernstein, who uses Fourier analysis⁴⁹ to “[suggest] a parallel between the science of sound and the poetic figure of the Eolian harp.” Bernstein argues that “[t]he figure of the Eolian harp presents a syncopated subjectivity in which music and language cooperate to form a bond between self and other.”⁵⁰ Bernstein’s approach is novel, and is a useful model for how to put music and science in conversation with poetry. Yet Bernstein here also takes for granted what Abrams argued fifty-two years earlier, that the harp serves as a mediating figure between the interior and exterior of the self (or, as Abrams writes, “between outer motion and inner emotion”).⁵¹ Both Morton and Bernstein treat the harp as image *and* instrument. Yet their focus, too, rests on canonical authors, and on the poems we have come to associate with the harp, particularly that by Coleridge, still ignoring the “bad poems” Grigson left to molder seventy years ago. It is precisely these kinds of “bad poems” that constitute my archive.

What was a poetic commonplace in the nineteenth century has become a scholarly commonplace today. Attention to the Aeolian harp as solely a poetic figure ignores the material reality of a popular and common domestic musical object, yet ignoring the ubiquity of the figure obscures the ways the instrument and image are integrally entwined. The Aeolian harp’s immense popularity in the home and in popular verse can illuminate not only figures for the poet and the creative process, but a conception of sound and music desirable at this time: a concept of originless music, the music of “nature,” or, the acousmatic.

⁴⁹ Bernstein’s brief definition: “‘finite and continuous periodic motion can always be decomposed into a series of simple harmonic motions of suitable amplitudes and phases.’ The convergence of waves explains the moment of apparent unity while allowing for a continuing process of differentiation.” See Susan Bernstein, “On Music Framed: The Eolian Harp in Romantic Writing,” *The Figure of Music in Nineteenth-Century British Poetry*. Phyllis Weliver, Ed. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005: 71.

⁵⁰ Bernstein, 70-71.

⁵¹ Bernstein, 74.

Like the figure of the Aeolian harp, the nightingale is similarly neglected in current scholarship, so long a cliché in literature that discussing its significance can initially seem pointless. As Thomas Shippey opens, “Listening to the Nightingale” (1970): “Nightingales appear so often in English and European poems that their association of sweetness and romance have sunk to the level of banality; because of this, attempts are rarely made to see any further relevance in the use of this bird.”⁵² Twenty-seven years later, Jeni Williams opens *Interpreting Nightingales* (1997) with: “The nightingale that appears so frequently in poetry seems an innocuous figure.”⁵³ It seems a critical convention to acknowledge the banality of the figure before discussing it; this convention also exists in much nineteenth-century writing on these figures, as though the harp and the songbird were and are always already clichéd. Writing in 1968, R.H. Hopkins encapsulates the type of sentimental poetry in which the nightingale frequently appeared:

Innumerable examples of this stale tradition were available in the magazine verse of the 1790s. The typical poem might be addressed to melancholy, to a nightingale, to the moon, or to the evening star. It would begin at sunset with highly artificial descriptions of either the setting sun, the rising moon, or the first appearance of the evening star. Next, the narrator might express his grief brought about by unrequited love. Luxuriating in his fanciful mood of melancholy, the narrator might then retire to a grove or bower where in isolation he would hear the sad note of the nightingale (usually Philomel) and identify himself with its song. Frequently this song would cease with the blotting out of the moon by a storm or by clouds, the signal for several lines or stanzas of Gothic description dramatizing the theme of mutability an ending with the reappearance of the moon. This

⁵² Thomas Alan Shippey. “Listening to the Nightingale.” *Comparative Literature* 22.1 (1970): 46-60: 46.

⁵³ Jeni Williams. *Interpreting Nightingales: Gender Class and Histories*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997: 9.

typical poem would then conclude with an assertion about the pleasures of fanciful melancholy.⁵⁴

The conventions Hopkins outlines here were also considered stale in the nineteenth century; periodical authors worked within (and parodied) these conventions over and over again.⁵⁵ The nightingale repeatedly occurs as a symbol of melancholy, a ready-made mood indicator—a nineteenth-century emoji--that a poet can drop into a poem without much context in order to evoke a relatively consistent set of emotions and mythology. So too, did the harp's standardized meanings allow writers to insert it as a set piece, again in order to evoke the associations with receptiveness, creativity, and sensitivity.

The Aeolian harp and the nightingale often do function in the ways scholars have noted (the harp as a figure for the poet's mind; the bird as a symbol of melancholy). Yet, the Aeolian harp was also a popular instrument and object in public and domestic spaces. Using the songbird's status as a poetic cliché as a reason to dismiss a vast amount of poetry, Grigson-style, elides other critical paths, for example, an examination of how the songbird became a cliché in the first place, and the permutations the cliché underwent over the course of the nineteenth century (a facet that I examine in chapter three).⁵⁶

I close with this brief critical history to outline the trajectory of my two tropes in the scholarship, and to demonstrate the repetitions that have considered two important poetic sound tropes of the nineteenth century largely by *not* considering their rootedness in sound. It is possible that this occurred, strangely, because of these tropes' very ubiquity—everything about them perhaps seemed understood, almost quaint, and nineteenth-century readers also regarded

⁵⁴ Quoted in Williams, 142.

⁵⁵ See the Lady Blessington poem, "Stock in Trade of the Modern Poetess," that opens Chapter Three.

⁵⁶ I address these issues in my third chapter, "Less Written than Dreamed," which tracks one pathway of iterations of the nightingale trope via the Felicia Hemans poem "The Nightingale's Death Song" and its subsequent musical settings by various composers.

them as known sentimental clichés and set-pieces fit for the gift annuals. In a sense, the trajectories of the harp and bird in the literature, and their paths in the scholarship, form parallel lines.

In the poetry, the harp's connection to birdsong illuminates little-discussed aspects of these two most popular, most hackneyed nineteenth-century poetic figures. An examination of the volume of Aeolian harp poetry indicates that the harp was much more than solely a figure for the poet's mind, and that the harp's and the nightingale's standardized meanings were connected to highly valued ideas about sound. We should consider the acousmatic as a mode that exists across much of the poetry discussed here, as Aeolian harp poetry attempts to *create* that desired scene of listening. Nightingale poetry, too, creates a scene of listening, and further uses that scene as an atmospheric mood indicator. The poems considered here perhaps demonstrate the desire for an illusion; the illusion here is the acousmatic. Even while Aeolian harp poems largely address themselves to and apostrophize the instrument, they also work to obscure the physical reality of that instrument: the mode of apostrophe, by locating the source of the music, underscores the poems' performance of acousmaticity. In a sense, this obscurity of the instrument as an object made its way into the conceptions of high Romanticism with respect to the Aeolian harp.

In evoking and inducing the acousmatic, Aeolian harp poetry and nightingale poetry traffic in illusions. As the anonymous poet in Thorowgood's pamphlet compares the harp's tones to the "untaught Virgin's Song," as Milton's narrator calls upon the "sad Virgin" to "bid the soul of Orpheus sing, /Such notes as warbled to the string" in "Il Penseroso," and as the electronic speaker Brian Kane heard chirping Madonna's "Like a Virgin," poetry about both the Aeolian harp and the songbird evokes the imagination of a sound never before heard, emerging from

everywhere and nowhere. At the same time, this idea of sound is represented by tropes “heard” over and over again. The illusion of the strange and new, something heard “for the very first time” is paradoxically presented by the clichéd and trite—just as Madonna’s narrator is aware of the stale conventions of feminine “purity” and plays on those illusions via an uncomplicated pop melody.⁵⁷

By considering this large archive of Aeolian harp poetry as a whole, we can see that the poetry operates using highly formulaic, sentimental clichés. These clichés, by virtue of both their content and their nature as boilerplate repetitions, work to evoke and induce the acousmatic. Though the poems state from their beginnings (often in the title) the instrument they often apostrophize, the poems themselves then work to obscure the instrument and source of the sound, leaving the sound itself for consideration—what the *musique concrète* composers call a “sound object.” The Aeolian harp was much more than a metaphor for the Romantic poet’s mind. The writing that helped establish the harp as such (that by Coleridge and Shelley, for example) was only the tip of an iceberg of popular “minor” poetry on the subject that appeared, over and over again, in the periodicals, gift annuals, and lesser-known books of poetry. Readers would have been familiar with the harp on more than one level: its romantic and clichéd status as a common subject for poetry and its use as a household music generator, which could provide a rather ghostly soundtrack to everyday life.

While I have focused, in part, on how Aeolian harp poems both glorify and obscure the instrument itself, my next chapter hones in on the harp as a common household instrument. To do so, I concentrate on a specific group of poems from the archive of Aeolian harp poetry introduced above: those written by and dedicated to laborer poet and Aeolian harp maker Robert Bloomfield. I demonstrate here that poetry was a crucial companion to the actual object of the

⁵⁷ Madonna. “Like a Virgin.” *Like a Virgin*. Sire/Warner Brothers, 1984.

harp. I also consider Bloomfield's own writing on the harp in his pamphlet, *Nature's Music* (1808), in order to examine how ideas of the acousmatic are intertwined with the concept of the "peasant poet" itself.

Chapter 2 : “Nature’s Music”: Robert Bloomfield and the Aeolian Harp

On September 15, 1806, the shoemaker-poet Robert Bloomfield addressed a letter to one of his patrons, David Steuart Erskine Buchan, the eleventh Earl of Buchan. Buchan, a Robert Burns and James Thomson enthusiast and literary patron, had offered to write an introduction for the second edition of Bloomfield’s collection *Wild Flowers*. Bloomfield, who opened the first edition of the volume with a dedication to his disabled son, Charles, uses the bulk of his September 15th letter to refuse Buchan’s offer.¹ In his conclusion, Bloomfield offers Buchan an alternative: Buchan could purchase one of Bloomfield’s Aeolian harps:

I cannot conclude without informing your Lordship, whom I know to be possessd of a love for nature’s music, and a fund of fancys, that I have lately taken up a new and most agreeable trade, that of constructing Eolian Harps. I am become rather dextrous in the use of the plane and the glue-pot, and find a demand that I am hardly able to satisfy. Can any thing in Nature, or even in imagination, exceed the tone of that simple instrument?²

It is unknown whether or not Buchan purchased one of Bloomfield’s harps, and no reply letter remains. While Bloomfield rejects the type of patronage that would have arguably benefitted his publication, if Buchan purchased a harp, Bloomfield would gain financially (and likely, immediately), and this transaction would not have the permanence or publicity of a published

¹ Buchan had gone directly to Bloomfield’s publishers, Longman & co., to suggest his introduction to the volume. See Tim Fulford, Linda Pratt et al. “Buchan, David Steuart Erskine, 11th Earl of Buchan.” “Letter 191. Robert Bloomfield to the Earl of Buchan. 15 September, 1806.” “Letter 178. The Earl of Buchan to Messrs. Longman, 11 March 1806.” *The Letters of Robert Bloomfield and His Circle*. Eds. Fulford et al. September 2009. *Romantic Circles*. 10 March, 2018. http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/bloomfield_letters

² Robert Bloomfield. “Letter 191. Robert Bloomfield to the Earl of Buchan. 15 September, 1806.” *The Letters of Robert Bloomfield and His Circle*. Eds. Fulford et al. September 2009. *Romantic Circles*. 10 March, 2018. https://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/bloomfield_letters/HTML/letterEEd.25.191.html

introduction. And Bloomfield's dedication to his son would remain in the second edition of *Wild Flowers*. Bloomfield's rejection of Buchan's offer would have been unusual for a laboring-class poet in previous years. However, Bloomfield was a newer model of peasant-laborer poet: one who did not base his career entirely on encomiums to his patrons, as previous peasant poets, for example, Stephen Duck, the Thresher Poet, had done. Bloomfield had more freedom to reject offers of this kind, offers that laborer poets of the previous generation may have felt more pressure to accept without question.³ The figure of the laboring-class, peasant poet was one that Bloomfield both accepted and resisted.

In offering Buchan the opportunity to support him by purchasing an Aeolian harp, Bloomfield does not stop at a bit of flattery and mention of his skill with the "plane and glue brush"; he attempts to sell a harp to Buchan by way of poetry, namely Thomson, reminding Buchan of a famous passage: the section of "The Castle of Indolence" dedicated to the Aeolian harp:

Your unrivalld Thompson knew it well. Witness his Castle of Indolence, the finest lines that can possible be written on the subject.

Ah me, what hand can touch the strings so fine?

Who up the loft diapason roll

Such sweet, such sad, such solemn airs divine

Then let them down again into the soul?⁴

³ See Annette Wheeler Cafarelli. "The Romantic 'Peasant' Poets and Their Patrons." *Wordsworth Circle*, 26.2 (1995).

⁴ Thomson's full section reads:

A Certain Music never known before
Here lull'd the pensive melancholy Mind,
Full easily obtain'd, behoves no more,
But sidelong to the gently waving Wind,
To Day the well-tun'd Instrument reclin'd,
From which, with airy flying Fingers light,

While Thomson was a particular favorite of Buchan's (and Bloomfield's),⁶ his work also remained widely popular in 1806, and his lines on the Aeolian harp well-known (and often harvested in barely-changed form in many of the periodical poems I discuss in chapter one).⁷

I open with Bloomfield's letter to Buchan because it demonstrates the integral role of poetry to the appreciation (and sales) of Aeolian harps. Poetry, and poetic interpretation of the harp's sounds, is linked to the object itself. Furthermore, Bloomfield's letter, while demonstrating that he was a new kind of laborer poet, also shows Bloomfield making explicit connections between the Aeolian harp and poetry, and, importantly, his work as an artisan, both as shoemaker and harp craftsman. This letter is only one example of Bloomfield attempting to control his life and work;⁸ here, he asserts his right to keep the original introduction to *Wild Flowers* and advances his harp-making side-business—an endeavor that links labor to poet, product to poetry. These connections make Bloomfield an important case study in my

Beyond each mortal Touch, the most refin'd,
 The God of Winds drew Sounds of deep Delight,
 When with just Cause the Harp of Æolus it Height.
 Ah! Me, what Hand can touch the Strings so fine?
 Who up the loft Diapason roll,
 Such sweet, such sad, such solemn Airs divine,
 Then let them down again into the Soul.
 Now rising Love they Fan, now pleasing Dole,
 They breathe in tender Musing thro' the Heart,
 And now a graver, sacred strain they Stole,
 As when Seraphic Hands an Hymn impart,
 Wild warbling Nature all, above the reach of Art.

James Thomson. *Castle of Indolence: an Allegorical Poem : Written In Imitation of Spenser*. The second edition. London: Printed for A. Millar, 1748: 21.

⁵ See Robert Bloomfield. "Letter 191. Robert Bloomfield to the Earl of Buchan. 15 September, 1806." *The Letters of Robert Bloomfield and His Circle*. Eds. Tim Fulford et al. September 2009. *Romantic Circles*. 10 March, 2018. https://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/bloomfield_letters/HTML/letterEEEd.25.191.html

⁶ Bloomfield's most famous work, *The Farmer's Boy*, was indebted to his reading of Thomson's *Seasons*. Jonathan Lawson. *Robert Bloomfield*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980: 64. See also Peter Cochran. *The Farmer's Boy by Robert Bloomfield: A Parallel Text Edition*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014.

⁷ See Chapter One.

⁸ See Fulford [pp]. Fulford also notes that "An overnight sensation on the market, Bloomfield found himself caught between the power of his patron and the demands of his booksellers, unable to please both or retain independence." Fulford et al. "Introduction." *The Letters of Robert Bloomfield and His Circle*. September 2009. *Romantic Circles*. 10 March, 2018. http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/bloomfield_letters/HTML/intro.html

consideration of the Aeolian harp as an instrument and poetic trope, and as a figure of acousmatic music. The language often used to describe the Aeolian harp overlaps with the language used to describe the songbird and the “music of nature.” Bloomfield, and the poems dedicated to him are crucial sites for examining this overlap.

Bloomfield’s letter to Buchan not only highlights his complicated relationship with patronage: here, Bloomfield also advances his own labor and craftsmanship specific to the Aeolian harp. As I show in this chapter, the trope of the Aeolian harp overlaps significantly with the trope of the peasant poet. On one hand, the peasant poet’s works, and the Aeolian harp’s sounds, were thought to spring from nature, without “art”; Bloomfield’s Aeolian harp business, on the other hand, was a product of his own labor and initiative, and one that he advanced—as in the case of Buchan—as an alternative to the patronage that supported his poetic labor. The tensions between “natural genius”—that is, the peasant poet’s works arise from nature, without the presence of labor—and the realities of life as a working class poet are played out not only in the ways Bloomfield presented and styled himself, but the way his friends and customers portray him in the poems dedicated to Bloomfield.

Because he fell out of popularity in the eighteen-twenties and did not ascend to the posthumous fame other Romantic-era poets had in the later nineteenth century, Bloomfield remained under-studied until recently. Scholarship to date has not focused on Bloomfield and the Aeolian harp in particular; therefore, this chapter will fill a gap in Bloomfield studies, considering a crucial aspect of his life and work, with implications for how the concept of the “peasant poet” was interrelated with the ideas of acousmatic, originless music (expressed in the poetry through the figures of the Aeolian harp and the poetic songbird) that I discuss in chapter one. The poems dedicated to Bloomfield discuss him in the language typically used in Aeolian

harp poetry; Bloomfield, as a self-taught, laborer poet, also overlaps with the poetic songbird, as the peasant poet was thought to spring from nature.

While my first chapter explored, in part, the repetition of the Aeolian harp as poetic trope in sentimental poetry by considering patterns over the large group of those poems, this chapter concentrates on a small cluster of Aeolian harp poems: those written by and dedicated to Robert Bloomfield. By examining Bloomfield's poetry about the Aeolian harp, his harp-making business, his 1808 pamphlet, *Nature's Music*, and the poems dedicated to Bloomfield and his harps, I also develop further an argument briefly introduced in my first chapter: that poetry was a crucial counterpart to the actual object of the harp. My first chapter established the immense popularity and ubiquity of the Aeolian harp as a poetic trope and domestic object by considering the bulk of Aeolian harp poetry at a distance. Just as there were dozens of poems about the wind harp, several of the poems mention that they accompany (or, feign to accompany) an actual wind harp. While scholars consider the Aeolian harp an essential metaphor in poetry of the Romantic period, scholarship to date has paid less attention to the ways poetry in turn was essential to the understanding and appreciation of the instrument itself.

Previously, I discussed an early example of this symbiotic relationship: Henry Thorowgood's pamphlet *A Description of the Æolian-harp, or Harp of Æolus* (1754). In it, Thorowgood, an instrument-maker, provides a collection of Aeolian harp poetry to date. The poetry here seems requisite to the appreciation (and eventual purchase) of a window harp. We do not know if Bloomfield read Thorowgood's pamphlet, but Bloomfield's own pamphlet, *Nature's Music*, compiled fifty-four years later, bears a strong resemblance to *A Description of the Æolian-harp*. Like Thorowgood, Bloomfield wanted to provide relevant information, literature, and advertisement to his customers (and potential customers). I examine Bloomfield's pamphlet in

greater depth later in this chapter. First, I discuss Bloomfield's history as a rustic, peasant poet; I then turn to Bloomfield's Aeolian harp manufacture, and the poems dedicated to Bloomfield and his harps; I then examine Bloomfield's often fraught relationship with his patrons, and that relationship's role in the bookplate Bloomfield crafted in 1812. Finally, I consider the posthumous Bloomfield through his epitaphs, obituaries, and *The Remains of Robert Bloomfield*, published in 1824, in order to discuss how "Bloomfield" the peasant-poet trope won out over Bloomfield the man, and how "Bloomfield" the trope (and the peasant-poet trope more generally) overlaps significantly with the tropes of the Aeolian harp and the poetic songbird. The trope of the peasant poet, while rooted in labor, often characterized the poetry as emerging from "nature" itself—effectively erases the labor of the poet. I argue that the poems dedicated to Bloomfield restore attention to this labor by way of linking Bloomfield's Aeolian harp manufacture with his poetic productions while still employing conventions typical Aeolian harp poetry. That is, the poems create a scene of originless, acousmatic "music of nature," while at the same time underscoring Bloomfield's poetic work and the manual labor of harp construction, thereby undercutting the peasant poet myth of "natural genius." Therefore, these poems, like Bloomfield himself, both perform and resist the peasant poet trope.

Peasant Poet

Much scholarly work has been done on the peasant poet phenomenon of the eighteenth and early-nineteenth century. Peasant or laborer poets were portrayed, in their time, as closer to "nature," emerging from the land, and producing poetry with "natural genius," as opposed to formal education. Peasant poets shared characteristics with the concurrently popular folk ballad, for example, as something that was characterized as emerging, authentic, from the peasant or

laboring classes.⁹ As William Christmas argues, the fashion for “natural genius” in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century diverged from the “classical” notion of “natural genius,” that is, “that an education is essential to the innately-gifted or divinely-inspired poet.” Instead of an education furthering what was considered inborn talent, from the mid-eighteenth to early-nineteenth century, education was in fact thought to hamper “natural” poetic genius.¹⁰ The vogue for rustic, self-taught poets rested on the concept of an inherent poetic talent; a peasant or laboring poet therefore did not *become* a poet, they had been one from birth, and the addition of “art,” would only diminish the peasant poet’s wildness and inborn skill.¹¹ Peter Denney argues Bloomfield “embraced the idea of natural genius and gained much confidence from its privileging of feeling, inspiration, and simplicity over learning and artifice,” and that Bloomfield “found the theory of natural genius immensely attractive, for it popularized an aesthetic which enabled him to circumvent at least some of the obstacles to polite literary culture.”¹² Indeed, as Christmas notes, “The lack of formal education and the hardships of poverty ... became cultural tropes which authors from plebian backgrounds could invoke in order to sell themselves to a

⁹ See also Simon White. *Robert Bloomfield, Romanticism, and the Poetry of Community*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007. White argues that Capel Lofft’s notes and commentary in Bloomfield’s *Rural Tales* provided an “authentication” similar to ballad commentary popular at the time, and suggests not only that Bloomfield was aware of Lofft’s attempt to link his work with the ballad revival, but that Bloomfield resented this kind of marketing ploy. White notes, “The association of [Bloomfield’s] poetry, even obliquely, with ballad antiquarianism can only have increased his anxiety that he was being constructed and read as a kind of anthropological curiosity which was the subject of scholarly commentary and approving critical judgment”: 97-98.

¹⁰ See William J. Christmas. *The Lab’ring Muses: Work, Writing, and the Social Order in English Plebian Poetry, 1730-1830*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2001: 25.

¹¹ Peter Denney notes that the escalation of the popularity of “natural genius” also coincided with a rise in political awareness among laborers: “the concept of natural genius flourished in polite society at the same time as the political horizons of plebeians were broadening, a development initiated by the Wilkes affair and then massively escalated by the British response to the French Revolution. The rehabilitation of Shakespeare and the cult of Ossian, together with a new degree of emphasis on the primitivism of ‘peasant’ poetry, all occurred against a background of polite anxiety about the increasing political activity of laboring people.” See “Talk of the Tap-Room: Bloomfield, Politics, and Popular Culture”: 6. *Robert Bloomfield: The Inestimable Blessing of Letters*. Eds John Goodridge and Bridget Keegan. December 2011. *Romantic Circles*, 10 March, 2018.

<http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/bloomfield/HTML/praxis.2011.denney.html>

¹² See Peter Denney. “Talk of the Tap-Room: Bloomfield, Politics, and Popular Culture”: 7;8. *Robert Bloomfield: The Inestimable Blessing of Letters*. Eds. John Goodridge and Bridget Keegan. December 2011. *Romantic Circles*, 10 March, 2018. <https://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/bloomfield/HTML/praxis.2011.denney.html>

reading public predisposed to support them.”¹³ Yet, while Bloomfield embraced the trope of the “natural genius,” he also worked against it, by creating a personal bookplate, and occasionally pushing his Aeolian harp business over accepting patronage.

Poetical Harpmaker

Bloomfield began publishing poetry in 1786. Considered a “minor” poet today,¹⁴ Bloomfield was one of the most popular poets of his time (according to Tim Fulford, Bloomfield’s *The Farmer’s Boy* (1800) outsold *Lyrical Ballads* twenty to one).¹⁵ Inspired, in part, by Thomson’s *Seasons*, *The Farmer’s Boy* tells the story of Giles, a farm hand (Bloomfield was also inspired by his own past, though short-lived, experience working on a farm),¹⁶ and is divided into four sections (“Spring,” “Summer,” “Autumn,” and “Winter”). *The Farmer’s Boy* both catapulted Bloomfield to fame and firmly established his image as a rustic, rural poet; Bloomfield was compared to and conflated with the character Giles for the rest of his life.

Importantly, Bloomfield self-identified as a peasant or laborer poet. Annette Cafarelli argues that Bloomfield, because his work focuses on subjects other than patronage itself (the topic of choice for many of his peasant-poet forebears), and because he “used the trope of the simple working class poet and audience to turn directly to the public, unmediated by subscription

¹³ Christmas adds, “--or at least tolerate them as curiosities.” Christmas, 27.

¹⁴ Tim Fulford cites several reasons for this: the Georgic fell out of fashion (and the rural style in which Bloomfield and others wrote was mocked by Byron); Bloomfield never completed or published his poem on imagination; his health and finances declined, but he never went “mad” like Clare (and he didn’t die like Chatterton). In short, Bloomfield didn’t share characteristics that propelled other romantic-era poets to fame after the fact, such as explorations of the imagination in the modes of Wordsworth, Shelley, Coleridge et al, “cult” status due to madness or untimely, tragic death, or the exotic cosmopolitanism and glamorously scandalous aura of someone like Byron. See Tim Fulford. “Introduction.” *The Letters of Robert Bloomfield and His Circle*. Eds. Tim Fulford and Linda Pratt. September 2009. *Romantic Circles*. 13 March, 2018. https://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/bloomfield_letters/HTML/intro.html

¹⁵ Tim Fulford. “Introduction.” *The Banks of Wye by Robert Bloomfield*. Ed. Tim Fulford. July 2012. *Romantic Circles*. 13 March, 2018. <https://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/wye/HTML/introduction.html>

¹⁶ See Peter Cochran. “Introduction.” *The Farmer’s Boy: a Parallel Text Edition*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014: 2.

patronage,” he was able to take publication largely into his own hands.¹⁷ In this way, Bloomfield breaks away, somewhat, from the traditional peasant poet model and into a new self-styled model under the rubric of the “peasant poet.”¹⁸ Bloomfield therefore knew the characteristics of the peasant-poet trope, and was able to align himself with already-established conventions while at the same time as rejecting offers from patrons like Lord Buchan,¹⁹ yet it would be inaccurate to suggest he was completely free from the patronage model. Simon White notes that “Bloomfield continued to juggle his apparent, and in a sense contradictory, commitment to both patronage and artistic independence until the end of his life.”²⁰ While Bloomfield’s writing didn’t focus on patronage, the amount of real freedom he had perhaps only led him to feel confined and struggle against his patrons—this new freedom gave rise, in a sense, to the tensions and contradictions of Bloomfield’s life and career. These contradictions in Bloomfield’s life, and his image, generate some of the overlap between poetry and labor, shoemaker and Aeolian harp craftsman, Bloomfield the trope and Bloomfield the artisan poet that this chapter examines.

A cobbler by trade, Bloomfield was also part of a larger tradition of shoemaker poets, which, Bridget Keegan argues, tended to dominate the field of artisan and laborer-poets. The shoemaker-poet in particular was considered the “poor man’s intellectual.”²¹ The trade was also known to attract smaller or disabled boys (Bloomfield was in fact considered too short for substantial farm work, which precipitated his apprenticeship in shoemaking).²² Furthermore, shoemaking was thought to provide good conditions for the production of poetry: Keegan points

¹⁷ See Annette Wheeler Cafarelli. “The Romantic ‘Peasant’ Poets and Their Patrons.” *Wordsworth Circle* 26.2 (1995): 85.

¹⁸ See Cafarelli, 77-87.

¹⁹ Not without strife: Bloomfield’s attempts to shape his own narrative exceeded the confines of peasant poet conventions, and the relationship of trope to man acquired more dissonance as the years wore on.

²⁰ Simon White. “Betwixt and Between Patrons, Publishers and Readers. *Robert Bloomfield, Romanticism and the Poetry of Community*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007: 81.

²¹ Bridget Keegan. “Cobbling Verse: Shoemaker Poets of the Long Eighteenth Century.” *The Eighteenth Century* 42.3 (2001): 209.

²² Cochran, 2.

to William Edward Winks' 1882 "Illustrious Shoemakers of the Modern and Ancient World."²³

In it, Winks argues that there were particular elements of the shoemaking trade that lent themselves to poetry, likely the fact that shoemakers sat for extended periods of time, and they were potentially able to write down lines that occurred to them throughout their workday.

Keegan contrasts this with Stephen Duck's "The Thresher's Labour," in which Duck laments the difficult task of writing because of his harsh working conditions.²⁴ On the other hand, White notes that Bloomfield had to compose poetry while working in a "confined and noisy space that he shared with a number of other shoemakers."²⁵ While Bloomfield had the advantages of sitting and working indoors, the conditions for a shoemaker-poet, in reality, were still far from ideal.

Shoemaker-poets also had an awareness of current community and social issues, and were known for this attribute, as opposed to the Romantic poetic model of the solitary, reclusive genius.²⁶ Bloomfield, too, had his finger on the pulse of current trends, as his manufacture of Aeolian harps demonstrates.²⁷ Aeolian harp specialists and instrument-makers Alan and Nina Grove²⁸ believe Bloomfield began building harps around the year 1800, although the Bloomfield Society has him begin harp-making in 1806, just two years before the publication of *Nature's*

²³ Winks was not alone in celebrating the shoemakers: the Victorian era saw a "flourishing of collective shoemaker biographies" fueled by a sense of nostalgia for the shoemaker poets and their cobbling trade, as new shoe technologies took the place of traditional shoemaking. See Keegan, 213.

²⁴ Keegan, "Cobbling Verse: Shoemaker Poets of the Long Eighteenth Century." *The Eighteenth Century* 42.3 (2001):203; 199.

²⁵ See Simon White. "A Lyric for the Artisan Poet: 'To My Old Oak Table.'" *Robert Bloomfield: Lyric, Class, and the Romantic Canon*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2006: 183.

²⁶ Keegan, 196. See also Anne F. Janowitz. *Lyric And Labour In the Romantic Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

²⁷ See David Kaloustian. "Robert Bloomfield." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 23 September, 2004. 10 March, 2018. <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/10.1093/ref:odnb/2676>

²⁸ Instrument makers the Groves restored a Bloomfield harp in 1980 (one given as a gift to Capel Lofft in 1808) for Moyse's Hall Museum in Bury St Edmunds and have both collected Aeolian harps and manufactured replicas of this particular Bloomfield harp. Bloomfield scholar John Goodridge conducted an interview with them in 2002. See John Goodridge. "Bloomfield & the Aeolian Harp: A Conversation with Alan & Nina Grove." *Robert Bloomfield Society Newsletter* 3 (March 2002). See also: <http://robertbloomfieldsociety.blogspot.com/p/chronology.html>

Music.²⁹ Bloomfield's 1806 letter to Lord Buchan, with which this chapter opened, suggests the Bloomfield Society is closer to the mark (in that letter, Bloomfield has only "lately" begun his "new and most agreeable trade.")³⁰ John Goodridge mentions that until recently, scholars believed Bloomfield's Aeolian harp venture was an attempt to make up for declining book sales, and that it was largely a commercial failure. Bloomfield was in fact quite successful,³¹ and White notes that Bloomfield "produced harps during most of the first decade of the nineteenth century, his most successful period in terms of both [book] sales and critical reception."³² Moreover, operating a side-business generally would not have been unusual for someone like Bloomfield: Keegan argues that many shoemaker poets supplemented their cobbling income with other work. Bloomfield scholars now recognize that he was not only a manufacturer, but also perhaps an innovator in the Aeolian harp world, developing a sloped soundboard unseen before 1808.³³ In

²⁹ Jonathan Lawson claims Bloomfield sold a harp to poet and journalist James Montgomery in the late 1780s. However, a letter from Bloomfield to Montgomery in suggests that in fact Bloomfield sent Montgomery the harp in 1809. Furthermore, Bloomfield provides detailed instructions to Montgomery in order to help him get the most out of his harp: these show Bloomfield's extensive knowledge of the instrument. He writes, "You know the nature of the instrument I send, and therefore I only observe, that if when placed *under* the lifted sash, or just inside, so as to conduct a current of air through the strings, it should not play satisfactorily, then take off the top board and place the harp alone on the *broadest* edge with the strings rising nearly perpendicularly over each other, and close to an inlet made by lifting the sash about an inch. I have no doubt that it will perform; but I should be glad to hear of any intimations to that effect, at any convenient time." It is probable that this letter was not available at the time of Lawsons's 1980 study (Fulford's edition was not published until 2009). See Jonathan Lawson. *Robert Bloomfield*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980: 20. See also Robert Bloomfield. "Letter 237. Robert Bloomfield to James Montgomery, 26 May 1809." *The Letters of Robert Bloomfield and His Circle*. Eds. Tim Fulford et al. September 2009. *Romantic Circles*. 10 March, 2018.

https://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/bloomfield_letters/HTML/letterEEEd.25.237.html

³⁰ Fulford et al "Letter 191. Robert Bloomfield to the Earl of Buchan. 15 September, 1806." *The Letters of Robert Bloomfield and His Circle*. Eds. Tim Fulford et al. September 2009. *Romantic Circles*. 10 March, 2018. https://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/bloomfield_letters/HTML/letterEEEd.25.191.html

³¹ Alan Grove tells Goodridge: "If we look at the sale of Bloomfield's effects, at his house in Shefford in 1823, we note that there were six unfinished Aeolian harps, and that suggests that he was still very actively involved in making Aeolian harps, possibly right up to his death. We don't know exactly how many he made, but we think that it was quite a big commercial venture." See "Bloomfield & the Aeolian Harp: A Conversation with Alan & Nina Grove." *Robert Bloomfield Society Newsletter* 3 (March 2002).

³² See Simon White. "Introduction." *Robert Bloomfield: Lyric, Class, and the Romantic Canon*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2006: 22.

³³ Alan Grove states in an interview with John Goodridge, "An interesting thing is that in one of Bloomfield's letters—I think it is to [Bloomfield's publisher] Capel Lofft—he talks about a development. He had discovered something which he considered quite a development in the design of the Aeolian harp, which he considered was going to improve the resulting sound. And I think—I can't prove this but I think that what he discovered was that if

regards to Bloomfield's pamphlet, White argues Bloomfield "clearly had a desire to make a contribution to our understanding of the Aeolian harp"³⁴

Patronage

White notes that Bloomfield "can be said to represent an important shift in the way laboring-class poets negotiated with patronage," suggesting Bloomfield was concerned with his artistic freedom as opposed to purely financial gain.³⁵ Bloomfield therefore had a difficult relationship with his primary patron, Capel Lofft.³⁶ Lofft was a well-known patron of the arts, a Whig, lawyer, and amateur poet. Fulford's brief sketch calls him "impetuous, energetic, and tactless."³⁷ Lofft also had the dubious honor of being mocked by Byron in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*.³⁸ A poem by "W.H."³⁹ in the appendix of *The Remains of Robert Bloomfield*,

you slope the soundboard, and then place the instrument in the sash window, then once you had got the cover in place, you then get a funnel effect. You have got a wider opening at the front, and what we do know is that there isn't any example of an Aeolian harp with a sloping or inclined soundboard before Bloomfield. This is dated 1808." See "Bloomfield & the Aeolian Harp: A Conversation with Alan & Nina Grove." *Robert Bloomfield Society Newsletter* 3 (March 2002).

³⁴ Simon White. *Robert Bloomfield, Romanticism and the Poetry of Community*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007: [pp].

³⁵ White contrasts Bloomfield's desire for control over his artistic production with the case of Anne Yearsley and her patron Hannah More. In their acrimonious relationship, Yearsley fought for control over the finances earned from her book sales. See Simon White. *Robert Bloomfield, Romanticism and the Poetry of Community*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007.

³⁶ Lofft had edited and secured publishing for *The Farmer's Boy*. However, Peter Cochran notes that Bloomfield did not know that Lofft intended to publish the work. Furthermore, Lofft apparently "sat on it, editing it, for fifteen months" before having it published by Vernor, Hood, and Sharpe. Lofft had gotten hold of the poem through Bloomfield's brother George, who approached Lofft after Bloomfield had tried to publish the work, unsuccessfully, with various London Booksellers. See Peter Cochran. "Introduction." *The Farmer's Boy: a Parallel Text Edition*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014: 3. See also "Robert Bloomfield: Chronology." *The Robert Bloomfield Society*. <http://robertbloomfieldsociety.blogspot.com/p/chronology.html>

³⁷ See Fulford et al. "Capel Lofft." *The Letters of Robert Bloomfield and His Circle*. September 2009. *Romantic Circles*. 10 March, 2018. http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/bloomfield_letters/HTML/people.html#LofftCapel

³⁸ Mocking both Lofft and Bloomfield (and the general fashion for peasant and laboring-class poets), Byron writes:

When some brisk youth, the tenant of a stall,
Employs a pen less pointed than his awl,
Leaves his snug shop forsakes his store of shoes,
St. Crispin quits, and cobbles for the Muse,
Heavens! how the vulgar stare! how crowds applaud
How ladies read, and Literati Laud!
If chance some wicked way should pass his jest,

“Stanzas, Inscribed to Capel loft, esq. On his Intention of bringing forward a second Volume of Poems, by the incomparable Author of ‘The Farmer’s Boy’”⁴⁰ praises Bloomfield’s rural, pastoral poetry and implores Lofft to continue his patronage of Bloomfield:

What though th’ Arcadian age be past,
And shepherds, ‘midst their myrtle groves,
With silver crook no longer graced,
Attune their pipes, and chant their loves;
In ruder scenes, to Fame unknown,
Her tenderest sons, on Nature’s breast,
Have raised such strains as thou may’st own
In happier days, in climes more blest:

‘Tis sheer ill-nature; don’t the world know best?
Genius must guide when wits admire the rhyme,
And CAPEL LOFFT* declares ‘tis quite sublime.
Hear, then, ye happy sons of needless trade!
Swains! quit the plough, resign the useless trade!
Lo! BURNS and BLOOMFIELD, nay a greater far,
GIFFORD was born beneath an adverse star
[...]
Ye tuneful cobblers! still your notes prolong,
Compose at once a slipper and a song;
So shall the fair your handy work peruse,
Your sonnets sure shall please—perhaps your shoes.

*Capel Lofft, Esq. the Mæcenas of shoemakers, and Preface-writer-General to distressed versemen; a kind of gratis Accoucheur to those who wish to be delivered of rhyme, but do not know how to bring it forth (Byron’s note). See Byron, George Gordon. *English Bards And Scotch Reviewers: a Satire*. Fourth edition. Paris: Galignani, 1821: 50. See also Jonathan Lawson. *Robert Bloomfield*: 22; Peter Cochran. “Introduction.” *The Farmer’s Boy: a Parallel Text Edition*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014: 9-10.

³⁹ *Remains*, 150-151. The author is William Holloway, a printer and clerk who, inspired by Bloomfield, published *The Peasant’s Fate* (1802). Holloway also authored another poem included in the *Remains*: “An Epistle from Roger Coulter of Dorsetshire to his Friend Giles Bloomfield the Suffolk Farmer’s Boy,” a poem in dialect originally published in the *Monthly Mirror* in 1802. See Fulford et al. “William Holloway.” *The Letters of Robert Bloomfield and His Circle*. September 2009. *Romantic Circles*. 10 March, 2018.

https://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/bloomfield_letters/HTML/people.html#HollowayWilliam

⁴⁰ Holloway’s was not the only poem written to Lofft regarding Bloomfield: poet John Black published a poem praising Lofft’s patronage of Bloomfield: “To Capel Lofft, Esq. On his introduction to public notice ‘The Farmer’s Boy; a rural Poem. By Robert Bloomfield’” in *The Lady’s Monthly Museum*, (April 01, 1800): 312.

Then come—for lo! the storms are o'er;

Enjoy thy harp, and mourn no more.

Bloomfield's second volume of poetry, *Rural Tales*, was also the source of a bitter quarrel, as Lofft attempted to insert several footnotes and material of his own into the work. This disagreement also dredged up Bloomfield's anger over inserted material and edits Lofft made to *The Farmer's Boy*. While W.H.'s poem states that "the storms are o'er" and asks Lofft to "Enjoy thy harp, and mourn no more," these lines do not refer to the actual harp Bloomfield gave Lofft in 1808, as the argument over *Rural Tales* (Bloomfield second volume of poetry) took place in 1802.⁴¹ W.H. refers to Bloomfield as Lofft's harp in this poem. As I discuss below, this is only one example of the overlap between Bloomfield and the trope of the harp.

In 1808 Bloomfield and Lofft quarreled again over Lofft's political footnotes and insertions in Bloomfield's work. Denney notes that "[a]fter Bloomfield had repeatedly requested [Lofft] to remove or relocate some footnotes and other paratextual comments from future publications, for example, Lofft resorted to the language of class privilege, 'renouncing . . . all future correspondence & conversation with a clown who would so forget himself to me.'"⁴² As a peace offering, Bloomfield presented Lofft with an Aeolian harp.

⁴¹ W.H. "Stanzas, Inscribed to Capel Lofft, esq." *The Remains of Robert Bloomfield*. 150-151

⁴² "The quarrel began when Bloomfield, under pressure from acquaintances in the London publishing scene, sought Lofft's permission to omit from future editions some radical remarks concerning the suppression of newspapers and debating societies. "In his notes respecting Newspapers and Debating societies," the poet later wrote of his patron, "he had originally written and pertinaciously retained a downright attack upon Government. . . . I still wish it was not there, for, I am not a politician, nor never shall be" (letter 198, 19 November 1806)." See Peter Denney. "Talk of the Tap-Room: Bloomfield, Politics, and Popular Culture": 20-21. *Robert Bloomfield: The Inestimable Blessing of Letters*. Romantic Circles. December 2011. 20; 21: (letter 197, 16 November 1806). 10 March, 2018. <https://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/bloomfield/HTML/praxis.2011.denney.html>



Figure 2.1: Bloomfield's Aeolian harp, made for Capel Lofft, 1808. Author's photo, courtesy of Moyes Hall Museum.

The harp is inscribed simply, “Robt. Bloomfield to Capel Lofft, 1808” in gilt lettering on black [Figure 2.1]. While Bloomfield intended the harp to mend his broken relationship with Lofft, the nature of this gift recalls Bloomfield’s letter to his other patron, Lord Buchan. In his gift to Lofft, Bloomfield presents an object made from his own craftsmanship; he does not attempt to make peace with Lofft by allowing Lofft to adulterate his texts. In this way, Bloomfield’s attitude towards his patrons, as evidenced in the letter to Buchan and the gift to Lofft, is one of constant

attempt to control his work, and his manufacture of Aeolian harps a crucial factor in this struggle.

Nature's Music

Bloomfield's harp also carries two decorative illustrations, one of a lute on a background of greenery, and the image below, a curling sheet of music resting on a flute or pipe, over greenery that appears to be honeysuckle leaves and berries [Figure 2.2]. The image of a curling sheet of music will appear again on Bloomfield's bookplate. Here, it decorates an instrument with no need of sheet music, as the Aeolian harp's defining feature was understood as the ability to play "nature's music." This illustration, like others in this dissertation, foregrounds the "art," that is, the constructedness of the harp. In the context of Bloomfield, this sign of the human-made aspects of the harp draws attention to both the labor of making window harps, and artistic labor.



Figure 2.2: Detail from the cover of Bloomfield's Aeolian harp (1808). Author's photo, courtesy of Moyses Hall Museum.

In 1808, the same year he gave the harp to Lofft, Bloomfield published a pamphlet entitled *Nature's Music. Consisting of Extracts from Several Authors; with Practical Observations, and Poetical Testimonies, in Honour of the Harp of Aeolus*.⁴³ Containing a variety of information on the Aeolian Harp, including a section of poetry, the work reads as an introduction to the instrument. Bloomfield's was not the first Aeolian harp pamphlet: Henry Thorowgood's 1754 pamphlet, which I discuss in greater detail in chapter one, is also a brief introduction to the Aeolian harp via a collection of poetry, serving as an advertisement for Thorowgood's instrument shop.

It appears Bloomfield intended to distribute the pamphlet to his customers or potential customers only. He writes in a March 1807 letter to his close friend Mary Lloyd Baker, that Lloyd's "idea of my being on the road to *publish* what I can gather as to the nature of the Harp, is wrong. I only thought of printing a few copies for private distribution to such of my customers as profess'd to know nothing on the subject, and just to make it pay its own expence, and stand as a profess'd compilation on that particular themes. It would save me much talking, and that to me is a material thing."⁴⁴

Bloomfield did, however, publish the pamphlet, which includes, along with information on the legend of the Aeolian harp and the wind god Aeolus, extracts from Sir John Hawkins's *General History of the Science and Practice of Music* (1776), William Jones's *Physiological*

⁴³ Robert Bloomfield. *Nature's Music. Consisting of Extracts from Several Authors with Practical Observations, and Poetical Testimonies, in Honour of The Harp of Aeolus*. London: printed by J. Swan, No. 76, Fleet Street, 1808. Apparently, Bloomfield lost his first manuscript of *Nature's Music* in a fire. He writes in an 1807 letter to Dr. Edward Jenner (Jenner was the developer of a smallpox vaccine that Bloomfield championed): "I lost a MS. in the fire which will cost me some trouble to reinstate; but as it consists of extracts relating to Eolus, I can make it out again." This suggests Bloomfield had the poetry he extracted in *Nature's Music* available to him. See Robert Bloomfield. "Letter 215. Robert Bloomfield to Dr Edward Jenner, 17 September 1807." *The Letters of Robert Bloomfield and His Circle*. Eds. Tim Fulford, Linda Pratt, et al. September 2009. *Romantic Circles*. 10 March, 2018. http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/bloomfield_letters/HTML/letterEEEd.25.215.html

⁴⁴ Robert Bloomfield. "Letter 203. Robert Bloomfield to Mary Lloyd Baker, 14 March 1807." *The Letters of Robert Bloomfield and His Circle*. Eds. See Tim Fulford, Linda Pratt et al. September 2009. *Romantic Circles*. 10 March, 2018. http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/bloomfield_letters/HTML/letterEEEd.25.203.html

Disquisitions (1781).⁴⁵ In this way, *Nature's Music* differs from Thorowgood's pamphlet: Bloomfield had more relatively recent scientific information with which to supplement the legend of the harp. Bloomfield also discusses the specifics of his particular harps, and how they, and his method, differ from the standard:

The harps I have hitherto made have been, though of greater length, on the same principle with those seen at the music shops; but, where circumstances would admit of it, I have endeavoured to divide the strings into separate octaves. I have however proved, at least to my own satisfaction, that the top, or covering board, is of little use, if any, and that the strings ought to catch the wind in an inclination more approaching to a perpendicular than to a horizontal level. For this reason, I suppose, I find the instrument, when placed with the strings towards the window, always performs better than in the usual position.⁴⁶

Because Bloomfield provides relatively up-to-date scientific information on the harp's sounds, and in addition discusses his own efforts to perfect his construction methods, *Nature's Music* in part belies its title: the first half of *Nature's Music* is in fact dedicated to "art," the mechanics of the harp and its music.

The pamphlet concludes with the requisite poetry (Bloomfield calls them "poetical testimonies") dedicated to the harp.⁴⁷ Bloomfield here even attempts to account for the clichéd similarity of so many Aeolian harp poems, writing, "if ten men are enamoured of the same thing,

⁴⁵ Jones provides scientific information on the acoustics of the Aeolian harp and how it operates. William Jones. "Physiological Disquisitions. Plate IV." *Romantic Circles*. 10 March 2018. <https://www.rc.umd.edu/gallery/physiological-disquisitions-plate-iv>

⁴⁶ Robert Bloomfield. "Nature's Music." *The Remains of Robert Bloomfield*. 1824: 117-118.

⁴⁷ "Nature's Music." *The Remains of Robert Bloomfield*. 1824: 128. See also Hugh Underhill, who notes that Bloomfield's inclusion of Aeolian harp poetry engages with the ubiquitous Aeolian harp sentiments flooding poetry by 1808, and ultimately claims that Bloomfield's own writing on the harp offsets the bulk of Aeolian harp poetic redundancy. "Nature's Music: Bloomfield's Not So Artless Song." *The Robert Bloomfield Society Newsletter*. No. 4, July 2002: 7-10.

and describe it with a feeling mind and appropriate language, can it be wonderful⁴⁸ that their verses should exhibit a similarity?” While Bloomfield did not include any of the poems dedicated to his harps in the original run of *Nature’s Music*, he refers to friend Maria Hester Park’s 1806 poem, “Lines Addressed to an Aeolian Harp, Constructed by the Author of the Farmer’s Boy,” which he “omit[s] with unfeigned regret. It’s insertion *here* would be the most unpardonable self-praise.” However, Bloomfield’s friend and editor Joseph Weston did include Park’s poem in the version of *Nature’s Music* that appears in *The Remains of Robert Bloomfield*.⁴⁹ I discuss Park’s poem and the other poems dedicated to Bloomfield, along with Bloomfield’s *Remains*, below. First, I discuss the trend of dedication in Aeolian harp poetry more generally.

Harp Dedications

Many Aeolian harp poems are directed towards the harp with titles such as “To the Aeolian Harp” “To an Aeolian Harp,” yet some specifically address (or feign to address) a specific household harp. For example, “To a Broken Aeolian Harp, On Listening to it for the Last Time, Ere Leaving a Long-Loved Residence.” The poem asks the harp to play one last time, “My airy harp! once more the winds shall o’er thee gladly sweep, / To rouse in every ringing chord the soul that slumbers deep”⁵⁰ The poem links the harp’s operation and brokenness to the fact that the narrator must leave home.

⁴⁸ *Sic*: possibly a typo for “wondered.” Bloomfield, “Nature’s Music,” 128.

⁴⁹ Weston includes the note, “Mrs. Park, whose tributary poem may now be introduced without any other sensation than that of tender regret, since both the writer and receiver are now beyond the reach of blame.” 140-141.

⁵⁰ “To a Broken Aeolian Harp, on Listening to it for the Last Time, Ere Leaving a Long-Loved Residence.” Metropolitan; Metropolitan, London 1:1 (1831:May), 61.

My airy harp! my spirit harp! if this our parting strain,
To stranger ears thy chords at least can never wake again;
Mine, mine thou wert, in days more bright—those days for both are
past---

Yet mine alone thy dying voice, the saddest and the last!”

Another example, Osmyn’s “To My Eolian Harp”(1833) addresses a specific harp:

My gentle harp, whence comes thy tone
My lonely hours to cheer?
What minstrel strikes thy silken chord
With notes so soft and clear?”

This poem also opens with a rhetorical question asking where the harp’s sounds come from—a typical Aeolian harp poetry convention. This poem however, concludes with an “Answer” verse after the poems first seven stanzas posing the question and several possibilities for the sound’s source (“fairy girls” “ocean peris” a “plumy warbler”):

To fairy girl, nor peri queen,
Nor bird, my tones belong;
But to the wind—sweet Nature’s breath—
I owe my modest song.⁵¹

While all Aeolian harp poetry is in a sense inspired by the instrument itself, several published Aeolian harp poems that specifically reference an instrument given or received as a gift. In these cases, the poem is a companion to the instrument (or, the instrument is a companion to the poem). For example, a poem included in both Thorowgood’s 1754 pamphlet and in Bloomfield’s

⁵¹ Osmyn. “To My Eolian Harp.:Answer.” *The Western Monthly Magazine, and Literary Journal*. Jul 1833; 1,7: 325.

Nature's Music ("Ode by Mason, To an Aeolus's Harp sent to Miss Shephard.") describes the construction of the harp and the act of giving it as a gift:

Yes, magic Lyre! now all compleat,
Thy slender Frame responsive rings, [...]

Go then to her, whose soft Request,
Bade my bless'd Hands thy Form prepare.

An early Aeolian harp poem, the first half of "Ode by Mason" concentrates on the construction of the harp. While many later Aeolian harp poems include the generic convention of the "unseen hand" that plays upon the harp's strings, the hands in "Ode by Mason" build the harp. Yet the poem's second half continues in language similar to Thomson's ("Wild warbling Nature all, above the reach of Art") that would become typical of the genre: "With many a Warble wild, and artless Air," "And lightly brush thee with their purple Wings, / To aid the Zephyrs in their tuneful Toil"⁵² Here, "art" is left behind, and the harp's "artless air[s] are now played by the "Zephyrs," that is, the poem now attempts to obscure the act of building and labor with which it opened, and in so doing, obscure and mystify the harp's music.

Poems that accompany actual harps often mention this fact in the title, as "Ode by Mason" does (another eighteenth-century example is James Dalloway's 1788 "Sonnet to an Aeolian Harp Presented to Two Ladies")⁵³ An 1835 poem, "To an Aeolian Harp Presented to a

⁵² Henry Thorowgood. "Ode by Mason, To an Aeolus's Harp sent to Miss Shephard." *A Description of the Æolian-harp, Or Harp of Æolus From the Earliest Account to the Present Time, ... Which Are Made On the Truest Mechanical Principles by Henry Thorowgood Musical Instrument Maker*. London: printed for H. Thorowgood, 1754: 4.

⁵³ Dalloway's poem adheres to Aeolian harp poetry conventions, mentioning the harp's "warblings ever check intrusive care; / The Zephirs, ever thine, on golden wings, / Gay Fancy's health-inspiring whispers bear!" (though it may be the only Aeolian harp poem to attach a health claim to the harp's music). James Dalloway. "Sonnet to an Æolian Harp Presented to Two Ladies." Stroud: printed by James Dalloway at The Fort, 1788.

Friend,”⁵⁴ like the previous examples, is addressed to the harp; the friend is addressed through the harp: “*Sweetly* sing to thy possessor, / *Naught* of anguish, *all* of joy.” Another poem accompanying a harp, “Lines sent to Mrs. J.M.C., with an Eolian Harp”(1857) begins with a set of poetic instructions: “The harp I send is still and mute, /But, *will* its chords to ring, / And tones seraphic from high Heaven/ Shall rouse each slumb’ring string.”⁵⁵

The admiring poems dedicated to Bloomfield’s harps therefore make up part of a microgenre that continued through the mid-nineteenth century. These poems also connect Bloomfield the poet with the instruments he built and, importantly, they draw Bloomfield as a peasant poet trope into the clichéd sphere of the Aeolian harp. However, they differ in a key aspect: they highlight Bloomfield’s labor by mentioning words such as “made,” and “constructed” in their titles. Highlighting labor in this way runs contrary to the ways in which Bloomfield is drawn into and equated with the harp or “nature’s music” trope as a peasant poet: an association that, by contrast, erases his agency and labor. Two poems mention Bloomfield’s construction of the harps in their titles, and the poems themselves still perform the same moves I discuss in chapter one, that is, they attempt to erase the sound’s origins. For example, Maria Hester Park’s poem, mentioned above, “Addressed to an Eolian Harp, constructed by the Author of ‘The Farmer’s Boy,’ Wild Flowers”, &c” begins with a rhetorical question:⁵⁶

What magic sweetness charms my raptur’d ear,
Like choirs of airy spirits heard on high?—
Now as some cherub-voice each note is clear,

⁵⁴ Epsilon. “To an Aeolian Harp Presented to a Friend.” *Musical Magazine*. Sept 1835: 152.

⁵⁵ C.G.B. “Lines Sent to Mrs. J.M.C., with an Eolian Harp.” *Godey’s Lady’s Book and Magazine*. 55 (Aug 1857):160.

⁵⁶ Maria Hester Park. “Addressed to an Eolian Harp, constructed by the Author of ‘The Farmer’s Boy,’ Wild Flowers”, &c.” *The Remains of Robert Bloomfield*. London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1824: 140-141. Park’s poem was also published in *The Monthly Mirror*, 21 (1806).

Now swells into celestial harmony!—
 'Tis charmed zephyr makes the varied sound,
 As on each string he breathes a trembling kiss;
 His viewless pinion wafts the music round,
 Whose swell is ecstasy, whose close is bliss!
 Oh sweetly raise thy more than mortal tone
 To *him* who gave thy frame melodious birth,
 The bard whom Nature greets as all her own,
 And Virtue honours for his inborn worth,
 For him, sweet harp! Thy dulcet strains prolong,
 Since pure and artless is, like thine, his song.

Park's sonnet characterizes the harp's music with descriptions typical of Aeolian harp poetry: "pure and artless," with a "more than mortal" tone. The poem notably compares the harp's tones to Bloomfield's poetry, and Bloomfield himself. Bloomfield's song here is also "pure and artless," he is the "bard whom Nature greets as all her own"—that is, a "natural genius." Bloomfield, as a laborer poet, shares characteristics also attributed to Aeolian harps: his "song" comes from "Nature," and "inborn worth," and as such is free from "art" or, education.

Not only does Bloomfield craft harps that in turn produce "Nature's music," but he writes poetry and embodies a rustic poet persona seen as stemming from "Nature" itself. Park's poem therefore employs not only the typical Aeolian harp characterizations, but also discusses Bloomfield using language often used to describe rustic or peasant poets, therefore demonstrating the overlap between these two conventions.⁵⁷ As a peasant poet, with "inborn

⁵⁷ For an extended study of Bloomfield with respect to the peasant- and laborer-poet model, and his work in the context of (and contrasted with) peasant and laborer-focused poetry in the lyric and ballad form (Wordsworth and

worth,” Bloomfield-- specifically because of his status as a peasant poet-- is in the same realm as the harp (for example in the line “pure and artless is, like thine, his song”): both harp and rustic poet produce an “artless” song. It was important that a peasant poet remain (or give the impression of remaining) without formal education. And yet, Park’s poem, while addressing the harp, draws attention in the title not only to Bloomfield’s construction of the harp (“To *him* who gave they frame melodious birth”), but his various publications—while Park’s poem speaks the language of Aeolian harp poetry, it also restores attention to the constructed reality of the harp, and links that with Bloomfield’s writing.

The following year, author “M.D.”⁵⁸ published a poem in *The Monthly Magazine*, also addressed to a harp made by Bloomfield: “Impromptu, on Being Presented by a Friend with an Eolian Harp made by Robert Bloomfield.” M.D.’s poem, like Park’s, mentions Bloomfield by name in the title. However, the body of M.D.’s poem references Bloomfield more obliquely:

Spirit of harmony, whose power extends
Through Nature’s vast domain—whose
voice is heard

In every breeze, in every murmuring rill,
In every sound, when evening’s placid smile,
Lulls the rude discord of the world to rest;
Oh breathe thy influence o’er my soul, and
teach

A language to its feelings. —Hallowed harp!

Coleridge’s *Lyrical Ballads*, for example), see Simon White’s *Robert Bloomfield, Romanticism and the Poetry of Community*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007.

⁵⁸ M.D. “Impromptu. On being Presented by a Friend with an Eolian Harp made by Robert Bloomfield.” *Monthly Magazine, or, British Register*, 23:156 (May 1807): 360. See also Fulford et al. *The Letters of Robert Bloomfield and His Circle. Romantic Circles*.

How shall I dare profane thee with my touch?
 Genius and friendship o'er thee spread, a
 charm
 Sweeter than even thy own mellifluent tones.
 Come, lingering Spring, ye gentle breezes come
 And wake these magic strings, and whilst my
 soul
 Feels their soft cadence soothing every sense,
 The ardent wish, the silent prayer shall rise
 That Heaven's encircling presence may pre-
 serve
 And whispering angels soothe her every grief
 Who with an angel's kindness softens mine.

M.D.'s poem connects Bloomfield to the harp by way of "Genius and friendship": Bloomfield's creation of the harp, his "genius and friendship" are here "Sweeter than even [the Aeolian harp's] own mellifluent tones," characterizing Bloomfield again in the language of the harp: musically. Sound here comes from everywhere and nowhere: we hear the "spirit of harmony" "[i]n *every* breeze" "In *every* sound,"⁵⁹ yet this poem assumes a baseline of "discord" for which the harp's sounds are the harmonizing remedy. The Aeolian harp poetic convention of the "unseen hand," which I discuss in my first chapter, or the convention of a nonhuman or spirit-like hand touching the harp's strings is also at work here in the line "How shall I dare profane thee with my touch?" Moreover, M.D.'s title, an "impromptu," besides the musical meaning of the term, suggests (that is, it feigns the suggestion) that the poem occurred spontaneously, without artifice. As in Park's

⁵⁹ My emphasis.

poem, Bloomfield's construction of the harp is evident in the title.

Park's and M.D.'s poems are not notable here for their originality, but for their similarity to other encomiums to the Aeolian harp. Yet, even as they adhere to convention, they are specifically directed at Bloomfield, his harps, and his poetry, making them notable in the larger context of highly clichéd, standardized Aeolian harp poetry. These poems present Bloomfield as in the same clichéd language as the harp: Bloomfield, as a laborer poet and harp maker, becomes another trope. Yet, because they focus on Bloomfield's creation of both harps and poetry, they give lie to trope of the peasant poet's originless genius, drawing attention to Bloomfield as a poet and craftsman.

Bloomfield's Bookplate

There was a marked difference between the way Bloomfield's friends, admirers, and literary critics portrayed him and the way he attempted to self-present. While Bloomfield's oeuvre was certainly in the rustic, rural mode, the bookplate he created in 1812, and later developed in 1813, is evidence of this dissonance. Here, Bloomfield implicitly mocks the patronage system and illustrates the overlap between his self-image as a shoemaker, poet, and Aeolian harp maker, and his public image as a rustic poet conflated with the character Giles from *The Farmer's Boy*. Importantly, the bookplate also contains an illustration of an Aeolian harp [Figure 2.3]. Similar to the sheet of music on Bloomfield's harp given to Capel Lofft, the sheet of music here is a strange partner to the Aeolian harp, which needs no written music or musician in order to play. Here, it is likely the sheet music is present to illustrate the effect of the wind, in order to suggest that the harp is sounding, as the sheet appears to be floating and is bent and curled in a haphazard way, as though it were being blown by the wind.



Figure 2.3: Detail of Aeolian harp and sheet music from Bloomfield's bookplate (1813).⁶⁰

Yet the presence of the written music also underscores the non-human music of the harp: in this image no human touches the harp, yet it can only appear to sound here by way of an image of something (sheet music) for which it has no need. Importantly, this harp and sheet music appear as another of Bloomfield's productions, as the bookplate groups all of Bloomfield's trades, poet, shoemaker, and maker of Aeolian harps, in one place. Positioned alongside farm tools and livestock in a mock coat-of-arms, the Aeolian harp and sheet of music are presented as part of his career and existence a laborer poet [Figures 2.4 and 2.5]: this image underscores Bloomfield's labor, both manual and poetic.⁶¹ The bookplate also exemplifies his relationships with his patrons, the overlap (or rather, Bloomfield's sense of the public perception of overlap) of the character Giles, the "Farmer's Boy," and Bloomfield himself;⁶² the placement of the harp image

⁶⁰ See *The Letters of Robert Bloomfield and His Circle*. Eds. See Tim Fulford, Linda Pratt et al. September 2009. 5 May 2018. *Romantic Circles*. https://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/bloomfield_letters/images/image25.html

⁶¹ Sam Ward suggests that the bookplate demonstrates that Bloomfield retained his sense of self as a shoemaker. "Robert Bloomfield's bookplate." *The Robert Bloomfield Society Newsletter*, no 1 (June 2001): 8.

⁶² Bloomfield was known to play along with this phenomenon: Angus Whitehead notes that Bloomfield sometimes referred to himself as "Giles." See Angus Whitehead. "The poet angling: an anecdote concerning Robert Bloomfield and a previously unrecorded epigram." *The Robert Bloomfield Society Newsletter*, no 19 (Spring 2010): 11.

here is consonant with Bloomfield's reluctance to accept patronage, and, by underscoring Bloomfield's poetic labor alongside his construction of Aeolian harps, defies the association of "peasant poetry" as stemming from "nature," without labor, or "art." The bookplate highlights the tensions between Bloomfield's self-presentation and the laborer-poet's traditional debt to patrons in its motto, "Friends in Need, and a Fig for the Heralds," which expresses care for real friends—or possibly Bloomfield's reliance on his own friends, who purchased his harps to support him financially--rather than take money from wealthy patrons (the "Heralds"). Bloomfield himself, especially in the later years, was often a "friend in need."

Bloomfield's revised version of the bookplate, appearing in 1813, preserves the shield images, but replaces the scroll work with images of two rural laborers: one holds a plow, the other a whip. Keri Davies notes that this particular replacement "breaks the rules of traditional heraldry by including supporters (two farmworkers), an exclusive privilege of the nobility."⁶³ In addition, the somber mask above the motto in the 1812 version becomes a laughing (perhaps sneering),⁶⁴ Dionysian visage in the 1813 version. On the right side of the shield, a shoemaker wields his tools and appears to be dancing, one of his own shoes beginning to come off in the process, a figure Angus Whitehead calls the cobbler's attitude an "artisan-poet rampant."⁶⁵ On the left are several farming scenes, tools and farmyard animals, along with open books (the largest of which clearly reads "Farmer's Boy." Above the books lies the square portraying an Aeolian harp.

⁶³ Davies, "A Fig for the Heralds: Bloomfield's Bookplate." *The Farmer's Boy: a Blog about Robert Bloomfield and His World*, Friday, 7 February, 2014. <http://agricolaepuer.blogspot.com/2014/02/a-fig-for-heralds-bloomfields-bookplate.html>

⁶⁴ See Bruce Graver. "Illustrating the Farmer's Boy." *Robert Bloomfield: Lyric, Class, and the Romantic Canon*. Eds. Simon White, John Goodridge, and Bridget Keegan. Lewisburg; Bucknell University Press, 2006: 66. See Also Davies. "A Fig for the Heralds." The scrolls around the original mask are also replaced in the 1813 version with greenery; because of this, the mask not only appears Dionysian but also, as Davies notes, similar to the Green Man. The Green Man in particular links the mask more specifically with European mythology and lore.

⁶⁵ Whitehead, 16.

1812



Figure 2.4: Bloomfield's original bookplate design (1812).⁶⁶

⁶⁶ See Keri Davies, "A Fig for the Heralds: Robert Bloomfield's Bookplate" *"The Farmer's Boy: a Blog about Robert Bloomfield and his World."* <http://agricolaepuer.blogspot.com/2014/02/a-fig-for-heralds-bloomfields-bookplate.html>
See also Sam Ward "Robert Bloomfield's bookplate" *The Robert Bloomfield Society Newsletter*, no 1 (June 2001): 8

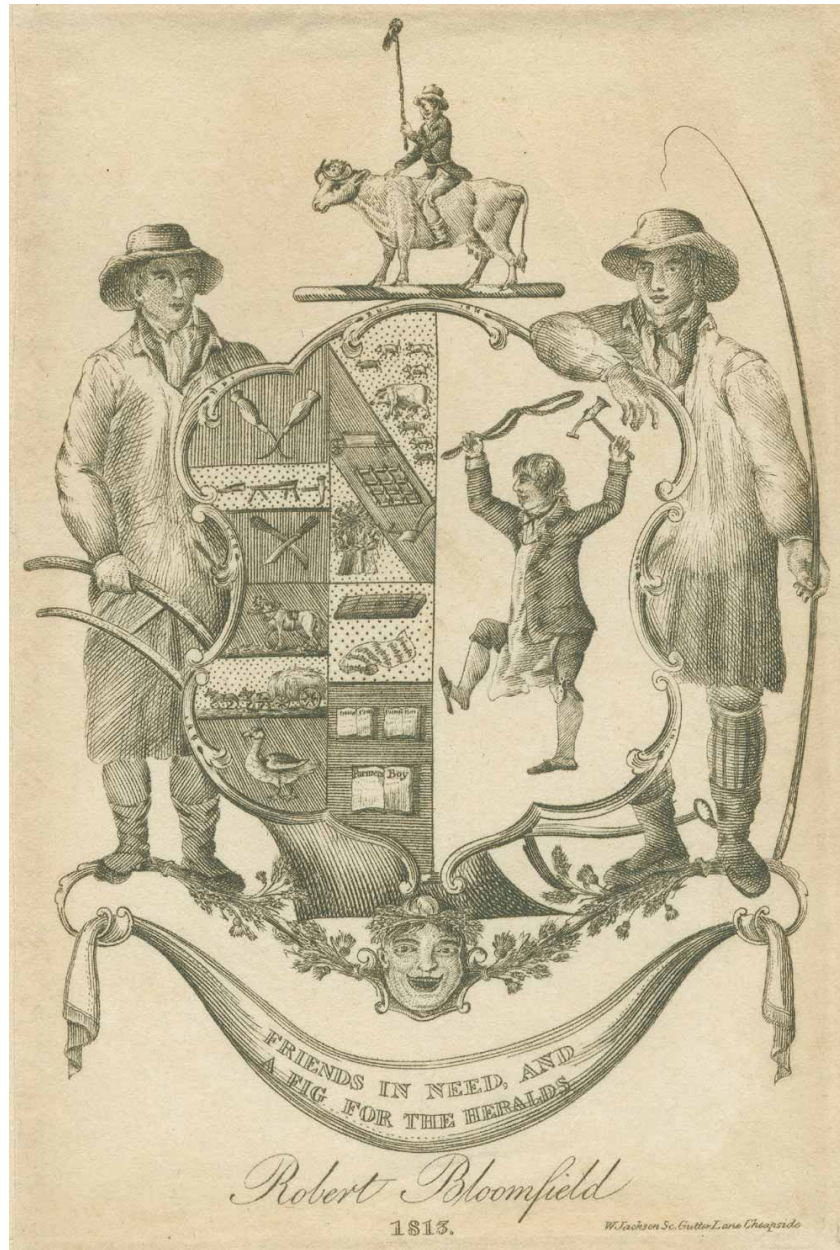


Figure 2.5: Bloomfield's revised bookplate design (1813).⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Robert Bloomfield, *Bookplate*. London: printed for Robert Bloomfield by W. Jackson, printer, 1813. See also See *The Letters of Robert Bloomfield and His Circle*. Eds. See Tim Fulford, Linda Pratt et al. September 2009. 5 May 2018. *Romantic Circles*. https://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/bloomfield_letters/images/image25.html

Bloomfield's self-presentation through his bookplate illuminates the connections between his work as a shoemaker poet and crafter of Aeolian harps, surrounding them with imagery that recalls *The Farmer's Boy*, and the reading public's conflation of Bloomfield with the main character of that poem, Giles. In this way, the bookplate implicitly comments on this conflation, and Bloomfield's public image as a "peasant poet." In his bookplate, Bloomfield illustrates the complexity of his life and careers, contextualizing them with his public image and complicated relationships with his patrons, all the while thumbing his nose at heraldry and, by extension, the nobility that provided patronage for his work in his early years.

"Wild Native Wood Notes"

Bloomfield's fame waned in the years after the bookplate, and he died impoverished on August 19, 1823.⁶⁸ Even Bloomfield's epitaph portrays him in rural, peasant poet conventions. His tombstone, located in the All Saints churchyard in Campton Village, Shefford, Bedfordshire, reads: "Let His Wild Native Wood Notes Tell The Rest."⁶⁹ This epitaph links Bloomfield and his life with the kind of music produced by the Aeolian harp and the songbird.⁷⁰ That the music of nature will "Tell The Rest" suggests a continuation of Bloomfield's life and work after his death, embodied in this music. It also implicitly places Bloomfield as a vessel for a wild, natural music that exists both through his work and continuously outside of it, as the sound of nature itself.

⁶⁸ Cochran, 4.

⁶⁹ David Kaloustian. "Bloomfield, Robert (1766–1823)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Online ed. Ed. Lawrence Goldman. Oxford: OUP, 2004. 24 Feb. 2016
<<http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/article/2676>>.

⁷⁰ The epitaph recalls Milton's "L' Allegro":

"Then to the well-trod stage anon,
If Jonson's learned sock be on,
Or sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child,
Warble his native wood-notes wild."

The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton. Ed. William Kerrigan et al. New York: The Modern Library, 2007.

Although Cafarelli argues that Bloomfield helped form a generation of laboring poets who moved away from the patronage model and attempted to take more control over their own work, Bloomfield's epitaph is another example of how the reading public (including Bloomfield's friends and colleagues) shaped his legacy and persona according to already established conventions of the peasant-poet trope.⁷¹ "Let his Wild Native Wood Notes Tell the Rest" is not, in fact, the epitaph Bloomfield wrote for himself in April of 1823, five months before his death. That epitaph reads,

First made a Farmer's Boy, and then a snob,

A poet he became, and here lies Bob.⁷²

Bloomfield's mordant epitaph is consonant with the ideas expressed in his bookplate. Tracking his progression from "Farmer's Boy" (that is, his actual former employment on a farm and his subsequent popularity and identification with Giles after the poem's publication), to his literary fame and (usually undesired) patronage entanglements, to poet, and finally, to death. Noteworthy here is the order in which these events occur. The progression from actual farmhand to the publication of *The Farmer's Boy* and subsequent literary fame is true to Bloomfield's life. However, Bloomfield states here that he became a "poet" *after* becoming a "snob," that is, after the publication and success of *The Farmer's Boy*. He then writes his name in a rhyme with "snob," but undermines and disowns that snobbery (or places it in the past, if we read the epitaph as a progression of life events), by giving a casual nickname, "Bob."

The progression from snob to poet runs counter to the typical narrative of a peasant or laborer poet: in that myth, the laborer becomes a poet first (or rather, simply *is* a poet, from

⁷¹ This also occurs in the case of Felicia Hemans, in this case, with the trope of the poetess and the poetic songbird. See Chapter Three.

⁷² See Peter Cochran, *The Farmer's Boy: a Parallel Text Edition*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014: 6.

birth), and is considered a “natural genius.” Snobbery, on the other hand, comes with literary fame, town life, and perhaps the education that was thought to impede natural poetic genius. Bloomfield’s self-characterization, then, is the opposite of the standard peasant-poet origin story. The epitaph that was used, “Let His Wild Native Wood Notes Tell the Rest,” represents “Bloomfield” the trope.

“Nature’s Child”

The poems dedicated to Bloomfield after his death helped shape his legacy as a rural poet,⁷³ and *The Remains of Robert Bloomfield*, published a year after his death, and edited by his friend Joseph Weston⁷⁴ contains several poems about and dedicated to Bloomfield. Weston’s preface characterizes Bloomfield as a conduit of nature: “His pictures are drawn *directly* from nature; are *always just* and *true*, like the reflections of a polished mirror; while in other poets we frequently meet with dazzling and distorted images, which resemble the face of nature when viewed through a prism.”⁷⁵ A few pages later, Weston writes that Bloomfield’s “soul was full of tenderness and harmony; and, like the sweet warbler of the grove, he poured it all out in song.”⁷⁶ Here, Weston directly compares Bloomfield to the songbird.

Notable is Thomas Park’s 1823 “Rumination Over an Eolian Harp*, *Made by the late Author of the Farmer’s Boy*.” Park’s poem is typical of Aeolian harp poetry, even in its highly

⁷³ See also Mina Gorgi. “Burying Bloomfield.” Eds. White, et al. *Robert Bloomfield: Lyric, Class, and the Romantic Canon*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2006. Gorgi argues that Bloomfield, along with other self-taught, rustic poets, were “buried” figuratively in the culture even before their actual deaths: “For the doomed Romantic genius neglect was seen, paradoxically, as a condition of lasting fame, but for self-taught poets such as Bloomfield obscurity was a claim to only limited attention. It was the model of [Thomas] Gray’s buried rustics that shaped the way Bloomfield was celebrated in his own lifetime and remembered by posterity”(250).dc

⁷⁴ Of *The Remains*’ editor, Joseph Weston, Fulford et al write, “Bloomfield’s friend in Shefford, a draper by trade, subject to depression.” Tim Fulford, Linda Pratt, et al. “Joseph Weston.” *The Letters of Robert Bloomfield and His Circle. Romantic Circles*. http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/bloomfield_letters/HTML/people.html#WestonJoseph

⁷⁵ Joseph Weston. “Preface.” *The Remains of Robert Bloomfield*. Vol 1. London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1824: ix

⁷⁶ Weston, xv1.

conventional title, which indicates the poem's consideration of the object of the harp as the point of departure, and suggests the harp's effect on one's thoughts. While the harp here is characteristically conducive to ruminating and brooding, Bloomfield's death, and the rumination *it* provokes, overlaps with this conventional Aeolian harp attribute. The poem also, typically, begins with an apostrophe to the harp:

Lyre of the winds! as free from studied art
As *he* who fashion'd this thy vocal form;
In many a sadly sweet and fitful start
Breathe now thy moanings; for *his* heart so
warm
With Nature's sympathies; his eye so train'd
To love of rural beauty, and his mind
So form'd to relish with a zest unfeign'd
The moral worth of man; are all consign'd
To the dank valley's clod. Yet is there trust
That life's quench'd spark with purer flame will
burn:
For when the mouldering flesh returns to dust,
The spirit to its Maker doth return.
Bloomfield! may thine have done so, freed from sin
By Him who gives new life, if rightly trusted in.⁷⁷

Similar to his wife Maria Hester Park's poem to Bloomfield, discussed above, Park here compares Bloom's artlessness to that of the harp. While the poem begins with an apostrophe to

⁷⁷ Thomas Park. "Rumination over an Eolian Harp, *Made by the late Author of the Farmer's Boy.*" *Remains*, 185.

the harp, in the penultimate line, Park now apostrophizes Bloomfield, bookending the poem with these two apostrophes, and further discussing Bloomfield in the manner of Aeolian harp poetry. Park also includes a footnote to the title's "Eolian Harp": "*This was the second or third [Bloomfield] constructed, and is made in the simplest manner." The note indicates that the particular harp Bloomfield made for the Parks was an early creation, and the stress on how simply it was made further illustrates the tensions between aligning Bloomfield's harps with his rustic-poet persona—that is, the harp, like Bloomfield, is something simply made, without "art" (or, at least, without *too much* art)—and Bloomfield the craftsman, whose construction of the harp is here highlighted.

The poetry and epitaphs included in this section underscore Bloomfield's image as a rustic, "natural genius." The poems refer to Bloomfield variously as "Nature's child,"⁷⁸ "Nature's fond bard, and unassuming child!"⁷⁹--designations that both portray him within peasant-poet conventions and present him as humble and unthreatening.⁸⁰ S.W. Shefford calls him, "The Farmer's Boy! Who sung of hill and plain;--/Nature's own bard!" conflating Bloomfield with Giles, the farmer's boy, and portraying Bloomfield as a conduit for "nature's music."⁸¹ Holloway's poem, discussed above, goes so far as to address Bloomfield as "Giles Bloomfield."⁸² Another includes the line, "Bid the young zephyr waft her sighs to thee,"⁸³ employing a convention of Aeolian harp poetry, that of calling on the zephyr to blow upon the harp's strings to activate the sound—here the zephyr is bid to "waft her sighs" to Bloomfield,

⁷⁸ Anon. "Verses to the Memory of Robert Bloomfield, *From Blackwood's Magazine for Sept. 1823.*" *Remains*, 172-173.

⁷⁹ W. Holloway. "To the Memory of Robert Bloomfield, *Author of the Farmer's Boy, &c.* By an Old Friend and Neighbor." *The Remains of Robert Bloomfield*. Vol 1 168.

⁸⁰ See also Simon White. *Robert Bloomfield, Romanticism and the Poetry of Community*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007.

⁸¹ S.W. "Epitaph on Robert Bloomfield." *The Remains of Robert Bloomfield*. Vol 1. London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1824: 184.

⁸² W. Holloway. "To the Memory of Robert Bloomfield." *Remains*, 170.

⁸³ Fortescue Hitchins. "Sweet rural Bard! whose magic numbers claim..." *Remains*, 149. The poem was in fact written in 1802, when Bloomfield was at the height of his fame, twenty-one years before his death.

who is here positioned in the same manner as the Aeolian harp in much of the poetry: *as* the harp, waiting for the winds to act upon it. Holloway's poem, "To the Memory of Robert Bloomfield," directly compares Bloomfield's poetry with the wind harp: "While thine Eolian harp's melodious chime/ In soft accordance, echo'd to thy rhyme."⁸⁴ Here, Holloway's poem also links Bloomfield's career as a poet with his business of Aeolian harp making: another instance of the harp as an object integrally connected to poetry, and to labor.

The poem "Verses to the Memory of Robert Bloomfield," recalls the sentiment of the epitaph on Bloomfield's gravestone: "Thy harp is hush'd, thy song is o'er,/ But what is sung shall long remain,"⁸⁵ this time referencing the music of the harp rather than the "wild wood notes," which tracks closer to the songbird trope. While the "harp" that is "hush'd" in this instance may also be the poetic lyre, because the poem is about Bloomfield, "harp" necessarily evokes the actual harps that Bloomfield made. This added layer of meaning also joins the harp as an object with poetry: here, the poetic lyre or harp overlaps with the Aeolian harp,.

The fact that Bloomfield was a poet who also made Aeolian harps at the height of their popularity in the home and in literature is unique. Furthermore, Bloomfield styled himself as a specific type of poet, a peasant or pastoral poet, and his manufacture of Aeolian harps and his publication of the pamphlet "Nature's Music" were part of a complex and fraught relationship with his patrons, and his constant negotiation of his various vocations. The poems dedicated to Bloomfield also express tensions between the idealized "peasant" or laborer poet and what Bloomfield hoped to become, that is, an independent author who could write what he wished without interference from or deference to patrons and the patronage system. The poems further draw attention to Bloomfield's poetic and manual labor, ultimately defying the trope of the

⁸⁴ W. Holloway. "To the Memory of Robert Bloomfield." *Remains*, 168.

⁸⁵ Anon. "Verses to the Memory of Robert Bloomfield." *The Remains of Robert Bloomfield*. Vol 1. London: Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1824: 174.

“natural genius” attached to poets like Bloomfield. I show in this chapter that poetry was essential to the object of the Aeolian harp, so too, was the legacy of Bloomfield the poet *and* Bloomfield the peasant-poet trope, shaped and inextricably linked to the poetry about and dedicated to him.

Chapter 3 : “Less Written than Dreamed”: The Afterlives of Felicia Hemans’s “The Nightingale’s Death Song”

Broken harps, and untuned lyres;
Lutes neglected, unquench’d fires;
Vultures pecking at the heart;
Leaving owners scarce a part;
Doves that, frighted from the breast;
Seek in vain some sweeter rest;
Feather’d songsters of the grove,
Warbling notes of joy and love
Hearts a prey to dark despair,
Why, or how, we hardly care ¹

So writes Lady Blessington in her poem “Stock in Trade of Modern Poetesses,” printed in the 1833 edition of *The Keepsake* gift annual. This excerpt is representative of the poem, which reads like an inventory of poetic clichés, which Blessington uses to mock the “modern poetess,” and the poetess’s reliance on those same worn-out tropes. Blessington’s poem is noteworthy not only because it is the only poem in the volume that mocks the typical, often sentimental and clichéd, gift book poetry, but because it features the poetic tropes of the songbird and harp as

¹ Marguerite Blessington. “Stock in Trade of Modern Poetesses.”, *The Keepsake for Mdcccxxxiii*. Eds. Frederic Mansell Reynolds, Mary Shelley, and Catherine Grace Frances Gore. London: Published By Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, And Longman, 1833: 208-209.

clichéd tools of the poetess (another trope)² and the reader's own knowledge of their very worn-out-ness.³ The poem also parodies both poetess "branding" and the gift book industry, both of which depended on a certain set of sentimental values and tropes. The gift annuals' poetry was often mocked by major poets such as Letitia Landon (who was a major contributor), Wordsworth, and Tennyson (both of whom also contributed), precisely for its middle-of-the-road appeals to popular taste.⁴

After its enumeration of contemporary hackneyed symbols, "Stock in Trade of the Modern Poetess" suggests that this catalogue contains all the items a modern poetess needs in order to construct a complete poem: "This now is all the stock in trade, / With which a modern poem's made." I use the word "items" because the term "stock in trade" confers an object-like meaning on the poem's clichés. The term also commodifies the tropes: these are the tools necessary to run your poetic business. Blessington—who was reportedly paid a guinea a line for her gift book poetry⁵—and her readers, would be quite aware of the gift annuals' existence as a

² See Yopie Prins. "Poetess." *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry And Poetics*. Eds. Roland Greene et al. 4th ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.

³ Much work has been done on nineteenth-century gift annuals. For example, see: Margaret Linley. "The Early Victorian Annual (1822-1857)." *Victorian Review*, 35.1 (2009): 13-19; Kathryn Ledbetter. "'BeGemmed and beAmulettered': Tennyson and Those 'Vapid' Gift Books." *Victorian Poetry*, 34.2 (1996): 235-245; Morton D. Paley. "Coleridge and the Annuals." *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 57.1 (1994): 1-24.

⁴ Gift annuals such as *The Keepsake* were extremely popular in 1833; though derided by major authors as too commercial, the gift books were a highly lucrative business, consisting of mainstream, clichéd poetry and tales, and lavish engravings. Poets such as Felicia Hemans and Letitia Landon were major players in the gift book industry (Hemans made a small fortune). The gift books were therefore highly commodified objects, and only certain subjects could appear within their covers. According to Kathryn Ledbetter, "[t]he guiding aesthetic in annual literature was that literature gives voice to desires of the heart. Eloquently written verses and tales about love or lost love, death, nature, and children dominate the contents of gift books." Other acceptable subjects included Christian religion, "married life, mild social concerns, moral lessons, and medieval romance" (Ledbetter 236). Unacceptable subjects were extreme negative emotions (although grief and sorrow were permitted), politics and current events, radical opinions, sexuality (although Ledbetter notes that many of the engravings were "overtly sensual"), and bad language. These were intended for the entire family to read (236). The books were also linked with an audience of women: "[m]ale elitists saw an opportunity to attach the literature in the annuals as purely feminine, thus inferior; however, the real attack was on the new popular taste." Kathryn Ledbetter. "'BeGemmed and beAmulettered': Tennyson and Those 'Vapid' Gift Books." *Victorian Poetry*, 34.2 (1996): 242.

⁵ See Paula R. Feldman. "The Poet and the Profits: Felicia Hemans and the Literary Marketplace." *Keats-Shelley Journal*. 46 (1997): 160..

booming industry. Because the poem portrays them as objects, it suggests that these tropes are so standardized that one can simply drop them into a poem, no contextual development necessary. Indeed the poem's logic relies on the obviousness of its subject matter: a "modern poetess" herself, Blessington does not identify songbirds nightingale, cuckoo, and lark by name; however, this elision in the context of her list of clichés suggests that readers would recognize the "Feather'd songsters of the grove, /Warbling notes of joy and love." They would also know the other musical tropes of "Broken harps, and untuned lyres; lutes neglected[...]" The forty-eight-line poem playfully tosses up trope after trope in rapid succession, but Blessington can get away with these shorthand references, first, because readers of the annuals easily recognize these clichés, and second, because Blessington's two additional poems in the 1833 *Keepsake* prepare readers for "Stock in Trade."

Given the parodic nature, and the subject matter, of "Stock in Trade of the Modern Poetess," it may seem strange at first that Blessington's other two poems in the 1833 *Keepsake* read as sentimental works that play their tropes straight, without irony or critique. For example, "Stanzas," includes the lines:

My heart is like a broken lyre
Which some rude hand has snapt in twain,
And on its chords the notes expire,
That music ne'er can wake again.⁶

"Stanzas" is a short poem of three stanzas with four lines each; the first and last stanzas compare the heart to a "wither'd rose" and a "lonely tomb," respectively, situating the "broken lyre" at the

⁶ Lady Blessington. "Stanzas." *The Keepsake for Mdcxxxiii* / Edited by Frederic Mansel Reynolds, Mary Shelley, and Catherine Grace Frances Gore. London: Published By Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, And Longman, 1833: 178.

poem's center. There is no ironic turn at this poem's end: "And hope no more her light can shed" is the poem's grim final line. Yet, the poem's organization around its three similes parallels that of the much longer "Stock in Trade": both poems read as a catalogue of worn poetic tropes.

Blessington's other poem in this edition also offers a compilation of the standards. "Twilight" begins:

Now twilight draws her shadowy curtain round,
And all the landscape wears a softer hue,
As if in grief; and e'en the plaintive sound
Of some lone bird, who carols an adieu
To parting day's last lingering tint of blue⁷

Both "Stanzas" and "Twilight" employ some of the same clichés listed in "Stock in Trade of the Modern Poetess," yet they do so without that poem's baked-in critique. I suggest, however, that their presence in the same edition ("Stanzas" and "Twilight" precede "Stock in Trade of the Modern Poetess" in the volume) subjects them to the same ironic mockery as "Stock in Trade": a reader would see some of the same images (a broken lyre, a songbird) repeated in Blessington's lengthy list. And, the presence of her two other poems in the volume help set the reader up for the punch line of "Stock in Trade."

I open this chapter with Blessington's poems in the 1833 *Keepsake* because the placement of "Stanzas" and "Twilight" alongside her parody poem is indicative, first, of how poetesses like Felicia Hemans,⁸ Letitia Landon, and Blessington herself employed and

⁷ Lady Blessington. "Lines." *The Keepsake for Mdcccxxxiii* / Edited by Frederic Mansel Reynolds, Mary Shelley, and Catherine Grace Frances Gore. London: Published By Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, And Longman, 1833: 264.

⁸ Hemans's big years in the annuals were from 1827 to 1830. After that, her income began to decline until her death in May of 1835. According to Feldman, Hemans contributed "at least ninety-four poems to thirteen British annuals, mostly during the years 1826 to 1832 and principally to the Literary Souvenir, the Amulet, and the Winter's

manipulated not only the clichéd tropes themselves, but those tropes' existence as commonplaces, and the sets of meanings attached to them. Second, the tropes themselves (including the trope of the poetess) in fact have a life of their own as free-floating sets of meanings. Previously, I argue that a pervasive conception of originless sound (the acousmatic) subtends many poems of the late-eighteenth century through the nineteenth century. Ideas in poetry such as Hemans's—that is, popular, sentimental poetry often seen in venues such as the highly lucrative and much-derided gift annuals, and in popular periodicals—can give us insight into conceptions of music and sound as they appear in the poetry during the transitional years between what we consider the Romantic and Victorian periods.

In this chapter, I explore music-poetry relations with respect to one of this dissertation's guiding tropes, the poetic songbird, taking Hemans's poem, "The Nightingale's Death Song"(1829) its various musical settings, and its cultural reverberations, as a case study. This particular poem, I argue, became associated with Hemans at the time of and after her death. Therefore, I consider Letitia Landon's "Stanzas on the Death of Mrs Hemans," and its musical setting (which uses an excerpt of the poem as an epigraph), and a late Victorian edition of Hemans, which, via its engravings, associates Hemans and her poetry with the poetic songbird.

As the following sections demonstrate, Hemans's poem portrays the nightingale as a figure capable of regeneration, yet this characterization relies on standardized, melancholy, meanings. Hemans reconfigures a worn-out trope, yet following her death, periodical adaptations and musical settings repurposed Hemans's poem, restoring the nightingale to its clichéd signification. These later adaptations also reconfigure Hemans's poem as an elegy, as the poem became associated with her death in 1835, and this repurposing occurred through sound and

Wreath." See Paula R Feldman. "The Poet and the Profits: Felicia Hemans and the Literary Marketplace." *Keats-Shelley Journal*. 46 (1997): 148-176.

music itself.

The manner in which Hemans reconceives the trope of the songbird, and in turn the way Hemans was herself cycled and recycled through the later Victorian period, reveals the way these tropes were connected to an idea of originless sound, and that this idea of originless sound was historically located in the Romantic period, and recycled and reconfigured in the later nineteenth century. Before considering Hemans's poem, however, it is worthwhile to consider two significant points in time. First, I move forward a year from the first publication of "The Nightingale's Death Song" to another event in Hemans's life: her visit to Wordsworth at Rydal Mount in 1830.⁹ I consider two letters written during this visit, which speak to Hemans's reflections on sound and music. Second, this chapter travels back to the composition of ten-year-old Felicia Hemans (then Felicia Browne), published in 1808, in a book of juvenile poetry, when she was 15.

Rydal Mount

Hemans visited the Wordsworths at Rydal Mount for several weeks in the summer of 1830.¹⁰ During her stay, she wrote several letters to family and friends. One in particular, presumably written to her sister, Harriet, contains this passage, in which Hemans describes one of her many outings with Wordsworth:

⁹ Nanora Sweet notes that in the previous year, 1829, Francis Jeffery called Hemans the "female Wordsworth"--Jeffrey reviews Hemans in the *Edinburgh Review* as a female Wordsworth who, with "tenderness," writes of "that subtle and mysterious analogy which exists between the physical and the moral world."

See Nanora Sweet. "Chronology for Felicia Hemans and Her Circle." 1996. umsl.edu/~sweetn/swethman.htm. 15 March, 2018.

¹⁰ Hemans brought her younger sons with her, and they stayed on Lake Windermere (at Dove's Nest cottage). Wolfson notes that Maria Jewsbury visited Hemans at this time (Jewsbury had dedicated her *Lays of Leisure Hours* to Hemans a year earlier, in 1829, and in 1830, created the character "Egeria" after Hemans in *The Three Histories*). Hemans and her sons arrived in June and departed in the middle of August. Susan J. Wolfson. *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Letters, Reception Materials*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000: xxxix. Sweet. "Chronology for Felicia Hemans and Her Circle."

We had been listening, during one of these evening rides, to various sounds and notes of birds, which broke upon the stillness, and at last I said—"Perhaps there may be a deeper and richer music pervading all Nature, than we are permitted, in this state, to hear." He answered by reciting those glorious lines of Milton's,

Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth,

Unseen, both when we wake and when we sleep, &c.¹¹

And this in tones that seemed rising from such depths of veneration! I cannot describe the thrill with which I listened; it was like the feeling which Lord Byron has embodied in one of his best and purest moments, when he so beautifully says, —

And not a breath crept through the rosy air,

And yet the forest leaves seemed stirred with prayer.¹²

The above passage begins with the two listening to songbirds, and differentiates between "sounds" and "notes." The animal sounds here become an occasion for Hemans to reflect on the limitations of human perception. Milton's "unseen" creatures in context of the birdsong heard by Hemans and Wordsworth evoke the nightingale, a bird associated with the unseen.¹³ Moreover, Wordsworth's spontaneous recitation as reply is consonant with his behavior during their outings: earlier in the letter, Hemans describes Wordsworth's "sometimes half-unconscious recitation, in a voice so deep and solemn." In this way, Wordsworth becomes the songbird to Hemans, that is, his utterances are seemingly spontaneous and usually without provocation or origin.

¹¹ The lines are from *Paradise Lost*, Book IV (ll. 677-678) *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*. Ed. William Kerrigan et al. New York: The Modern Library, 2007: 405. Adam is getting nostalgic about Eden. See also Diego Saglia. "'A Deeper and Richer Music': The Poetics of Sound and Voice in Felicia Hemans's 1820s Poetry." *ELH* 74.2 (2007): 351.

¹² Felicia Hemans. "To ?Harriett Hughes. Dove New, Ambleside, early July 1830." See Wolfson, 508-509.

¹³ I discuss cultural associations with the nightingale at greater length in Chapter One.

The “deeper and richer music” to which Hemans refers in this letter is, firstly, evocative of Coleridge’s supposition “And what if all nature be but organic harps diversely framed?”¹⁴ Second, this statement in the context of the letter also theorizes about sound and its origins. Diego Saglia discusses this particular letter at length¹⁵, and argues that Hemans’s poetry doesn’t rely on disembodied sound (acousmatic sound), and that “the phonic and acoustic dimension in her verse is based on stratifications of previous voices and sounds” and that these voices and sounds are drawn from specific people and places and are “situated within cultural and ideological contexts drawn from history or historically grounded literary and non-literary sources or connected with men and women in identifiable settings and situations.”

Here, Saglia convincingly claims that sound in Hemans’s poetry is not originless or disembodied, but in fact completely rooted in history. However, I deepen this historicization, and argue that the very idea of originless and disembodied sound is itself historically situated.¹⁶ This was a time when Blessington could drop in acousmatic sound tropes such as the songbird into her gift annual poetry, and expect their meaning would be understood. While Saglia focuses on what Wordsworth said (that is, Wordsworth is quoted as repeating lines from *Paradise Lost*) I focus instead on how Hemans described Wordsworth and his utterance—that it, how Hemans heard Wordsworth—contextualizing it with both a larger excerpt from this letter than Saglia considers (his excerpt ends with “such depths of veneration!” and leaves out Hemans’s reference to Byron), and another letter that Hemans wrote to her friend John Lodge.

Hemans wrote her letter to Lodge (who set “The Nightingale’s Death Song” to music the year of its publication) during this same visit to Rydal Mount. Again, she discusses her

¹⁴ Samuel Taylor Coleridge. “Effusion XXXV.” *Coleridge’s Poetry and Prose*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004:19.

¹⁵ See Saglia, 352.

¹⁶ I discuss this in greater detail in Chapter One.

excursions with Wordsworth:

I have much of [Wordsworth's] society, as he walks by me while I ride to explore the mountain glens and waterfalls, and he occasionally repeats passages of his own poems in a deep and thinking tone, which harmonizes well with the spirit of these scenes¹⁷

Again, Hemans characterizes Wordsworth as harmonizing with nature (the “spirit of these scenes”) and the way in which she describes his tone recalls a moment in “The Nightingale’s Death Song,” which I discuss below: the nightingale’s “deep farewell tone.” Hemans’s descriptions portray Wordsworth as almost Aeolian in nature: he recites passages of his own poems (and Milton’s) at random and “half-unconsciously,” a practice Hemans describes as in harmony with the natural surroundings. But is Wordsworth here just an echo of his own (and others’) poetry, self-repeating? Hemans doesn’t attribute conscious deliberation to Wordsworth’s casual recitations; rather, she characterizes them as springing from some deep source, the way that the songbirds “[break] upon the stillness.”¹⁸ Hemans conceptualizes Wordsworth as the voice of nature, as an Aeolian harp or nightingale, that is, perceived as emitting sound and meaning as played upon by the non-human. Hemans establishes this conceptualization through listening to and describing sound.

“The Nightingale’s Death Song”

The trope of the songbird was nothing new to Hemans who, at age 10, wrote:

Ah! then I love to linger in the vale,
And hear the bird of eve’s romantic tale;
I love the rocky sea-beach to explore,

¹⁷ Felicia Hemans. “To John Lodge. Rydal Mount, 24 June 1830.” In Wolfson, 504.

¹⁸ Felicia Hemans. “To ?Harriett Hughes. Dove New, Ambleside, early July 1830.” In Wolfson, 508-509.

Where the clear wave flows murmuring to the shore;
To hear the shepherd's plaintive music sound,
While Echo answers from the woods around;
To watch the twilight spread a gentle veil
Of melting shadows o'er the grassy dale.
To view the smile of evening on the sea;
Ah! these are pleasures dear to me.
To wander with the melancholy muse,
Where waving trees their pensive shade diffuse.¹⁹

The bird is of course the nightingale, and the poem is another catalogue of standard melancholy tropes (the poem is entitled "Melancholy"). Twenty-one years later, Hemans publishes another nightingale poem. This time, rather than inserting the melancholy songbird as a set piece, "The Nightingale's Death-Song" reworks the trope, suggesting a generative and cyclical meaning. Because I discuss several different adaptations of "The Nightingale's Death Song," it is worth quoting the poem in full, as it originally appeared:

Mournfully, sing mournfully,
And die away, my heart!
The rose, the glorious rose is gone,
And I, too, will depart.

The skies have lost their splendour
The waters changed their tone,

¹⁹ Felicia Hemans. "Melancholy..*Poems, by Felicia Dorothea Browne*. 1st ed. Liverpool: Printed By G. F. Harris, For T. Cadell And W. Davies, Strand, London, 1808: 46.

And wherefore, in the faded world,
Should music linger on?

Where is the golden sunshine,
And where the flower-cups's glow?
And where the joy of the dancing leaves
And the fountain's laughing flow?

A voice, in every whisper
Of the wave, the bough, the air,
Comes asking for the beautiful,
And moaning, "Where, oh! where?"

Tell of the brightness parted,
Thou bee, thou lamb at play!
Thou lark, in thy victorious mirth!
—Are ye, too, passed away?

Mournfully, sing mournfully!
The royal rose is gone.
Melt from the woods, my spirit, melt
In one deep farewell tone!

Not so!—swell forth triumphantly,
The full, rich, fervent strain!
Hence with young love and life I go,
In the summer's joyous train.

With sunshine, with sweet odour,
With every precious thing,
Upon the last warm southern breeze
My soul its flight shall wing.

Alone I shall not linger,
When the days of hope are past,
To watch the fall of leaf by leaf,
To wait the rushing blast.

Triumphantly, triumphantly!
Sing to the woods, I go!
For me, perchance, in other lands,
The glorious rose may blow.

The sky's transparent azure,
And the greensward's violet breath,
And the dance of light leaves in the wind,

May there know nought of death.

No more, no more sing mournfully,

Swell high, then break, my heart

With love, the spirit of the woods,

With summer I depart!

The poem first appeared in *The New Monthly Magazine* in 1829,²⁰ and was published in *The Museum of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art* later in 1829, and subsequently reviewed in *The Athenaeum*, in 1830. Hemans included the poem in *Songs of the Affections* (1830).²¹ Several international periodicals also published the poem (which ran through a spate of American publications in the autumn of 1829): *The Albion*, *The Museum of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art*, and *The Athenaeum; or, Spirit of the English Magazines*.²² The poem was also given three different musical settings: by John Lodge in 1829, by American George Kingsley in 1835, the year of Hemans's death, and finally by another American, C. Seemüller, in 1846—eleven years after Hemans's death. Letitia Landon used lines from "The Nightingale's Death Song" as an epigraph to her 1835 "Stanzas on the Death of Mrs Hemans," which I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter, along with the musical settings.

²⁰ Felicia Hemans. "The Nightingale's Death Song." *The New Monthly Magazine*. London, H. Colburn. Ser 2. Vol 26, 1829: 224.

²¹ Felicia Hemans. *Songs of the Affections: With Other Poems*. Edinburgh: W. Blackwood, 1830. The title page of *Songs of the Affections* displays this epigraph:

They tell but dreams—a lonely spirit's dreams—
Yet ever through their fleeting imagery
Wanders a vein of melancholy love,
An aimless thought of home: as in the song
Of the caged skylark ye may deem there dwells
A passionate memory of blue skies and flowers,
And living streams—far off!

²² Felicia Hemans. "The Nightingale's Death Song." *The Albion, A Journal of News, Politics and Literature*, 8.19 (1829): 145.; ". " *The Museum of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art*, 15.89 (1829): 430.; ". " *The Athenaeum; or, Spirit of the English Magazines*, 3.3 (1829): 25.

“The Nightingale’s Death Song” was a popular poem of Hemans’s from the time of its publication through the later years of the nineteenth century. However, it has not been discussed in current Hemans scholarship,²³ nor is it included in Susan Wolfson’s scholarly edition of Hemans’ selected poems (2000), reception materials and letters (in addition, only six of Hemans’s numerous gift annual poems²⁴ are included in the volume).

“The Nightingale’s Death Song” is a ballad-meter poem in twelve stanzas and abab rhyme. The title coupled with the first stanza establishes that it is the nightingale itself that narrates the poem. Therefore, Hemans’s poem does not involve a human narrator who invokes the nightingale as symbol of sadness or melancholy, or as mythical allusion. Hemans’s nightingale is not one of Lady Blessington’s “feathered songsters of the grove.” Instead, this nightingale tells of its own emotions and actions, and even though those emotions and actions rely on established connotations of the nightingale trope, they ultimately break free of them.

The poem’s first six stanzas are melancholy (“Mournfully, sing mournfully”), as the bird details the changing of the season from summer to autumn, and laments that it must leave. However, the second six are triumphant (“Not so!—swell forth triumphantly”), as the bird tells how it will migrate upon “the last warm southern breeze.” These two sections are separated by melancholy’s pivot into triumph at the meeting point between the sixth and seventh stanzas. Because the nightingale itself narrates “The Nightingale’s Death Song,” the trope of the songbird comes to life as an agent. The bird’s agency here turns on ideas of acousmatic sound and music: the nightingale, a bird that was thought to sing only at night, unseen, *appears* and tells its story.

²³ It is possible that the gift-annual subject matter of “The Nightingale’s Death Song,” and Hemans’s other works for the annuals, and their popularity, could be the reason for this. It may be an unfortunate by-product of so-called recovery efforts that material considered less “serious” by contemporary scholarship, material considered less in tune with nation, gender, or myriad other contemporary critical lenses, is initially overlooked.

²⁴ She contributed almost one hundred poems to the annuals. See Feldman, Paula R. “The Poet and the Profits: Felicia Hemans and the Literary Marketplace.” *Keats-Shelley Journal*. 46 (1997): 160.

Similar to the way Lady Blessington's "Stock in Trade of the Modern Poetess" depends on tropes of originless, acousmatic sound and the emotions linked to them in sentimental, gift-annual poetry, Hemans's poem presents a trope that talks, or sings, to us--one that we can only understand by way of its existence as cliché. That is, in order to understand the nightingale trope as *alive*, we must first understand it as dead (the cliché); this is mirrored in the poem's pivot from melancholy to triumph.

While this could be a reimagining of the trope within the narrow confines of what Hemans saw as her brand, I suggest that "The Nightingale's Death Song" is an example of the clichéd trope of the songbird dismantling itself as a cliché and reimagining itself as a figure with a shifting set of meanings. Hemans was understood, in her time, as a poet who pushed on the boundaries of the generic. Brandy Ryan suggests that Letitia Landon, with regards to her poem "Stanzas on the Death of Mrs. Hemans," "sees Hemans as a poet who transcended the fixed forms of the poetess, an active creative agent, rather than a passive emotional vessel."²⁵ So too, does Hemans's nightingale become an agent in "The Nightingale's Death Song": as Hemans moves beyond the poetess trope, her songbird attempts a similar reconfiguration of its own associations. Here, the nightingale, too, is no longer a "passive emotional vessel."

The poem also sets the nightingale within an atmospheric soundscape that parallels visual and color intensity with sound. For example, the second stanza:

The skies have lost their splendour
The waters changed their tone,
And wherefore, in the faded world,
Should music linger on?

²⁵ See Brandy Ryan. "'Echo and Reply': The Elegies of Felicia Hemans, Letitia Landon, and Elizabeth Barrett." *Victorian Poetry* 46.3 (2008): 262.

The word “tone” here can indicate both a visual and auditory aspect of the waters. The nightingale’s world is “fading” in color and sound; atmospheric noise is diminishing, and common ambient tropes such as “the ocean’s roar”—to invoke Lady Blessington again--become waters that “[change] their tone.” The sound is also fading in part because the nightingale itself is leaving, yet the poem taken as a whole expresses the opposite: the entire poem is a nightingale’s song. That is, the nightingale tells us the sound is fading, yet paradoxically provides us with this information through sound.

“Tone” appears again in the sixth stanza, which repeats the poem’s opening with more emphasis:

Mournfully, sing mournfully!

The royal rose is gone.

Melt from the woods, my spirit, melt

In one deep farewell tone!

This time, “tone” is musical, and yet it accompanies the nightingale’s “spirit” as it “melts” from the woods.²⁶ The word “tone,” in addition, is always an off-rhyme (with “on” and “gone,” respectively). Here, the spirit of nightingale seems to either encompass music or sound itself, or is in fact enmeshed with all sounds of the woods:

A voice, in every whisper

Of the wave, the bough, the air,

Comes asking for the beautiful,

And moaning, ‘Where, oh! Where?’

²⁶ This fading of the nightingale’s song recalls a similar move in Keats’s ode on the subject; I discuss Keats in greater depth in chapter four.

The “voice” in this stanza seems to come from everywhere and nowhere.

After the sixth stanza’s “deep farewell tone!,” the poem undergoes a major mood shift:

Not so!—swell forth triumphantly,
The full, rich, fervent strain!
Hence with young love and life I go
In the summer’s joyous train.

Here again, the nightingale directs its own singing, this time to “swell forth triumphantly.” What follows this transition stanza is a restoration of the faded sound and color of the poem’s melancholy first six stanzas:

The sky’s transparent azure,
And the greensward’s violet breath,
And the dance of light leaves in the wind,
May there know nought of death

Here, the poem links, in another synesthetic moment (“violet breath”), breath with spirit, music, and the wind.

Hemans’s poem recalls in particular the fifth section of Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind,” published nine years earlier, in 1820:

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
What if my leaves are falling like its own!
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies
Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, Spirit fierce,

My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe

Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!

And, by the incantation of this verse,

Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth

Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!

Be through my lips to unawakened Earth

The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,

If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?²⁷

This is not to suggest “The Nightingale’s Death-Song” is derivative of Shelley’s earlier poem, but to mark a point of convergence between the two; Hemans’s nightingale is an iteration of Shelley’s Aeolian lyre, speaking *as* the voice of the forest. While Shelley’s speaker addresses the wind, Hemans’s nightingale both addresses and directs its own singing (ordering it to shift from mournful to triumphant).

The generative aspect of Shelley’s poem also appears in Hemans: while “The Nightingale’s Death Song” does not use the interlinked rhymes of Shelley’s *terza rima*, it enacts a similarly circular pattern of generation and regeneration. This enactment of regeneration is crucial to Hemans’s poem’s interpretation of the nightingale trope. However, as the poem is circulated and re-circulated in the years leading up to and after Hemans’s death, this particular aspect of the

²⁷ Percy Bysshe Shelley. “Ode to the West Wind.” Reiman, Donald H. and Fraistat, Neil. *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1977: 300-301.

poem, and therefore the poem's portrayal of the nightingale trope, becomes obscured. Both the adaptations and musical settings of "The Nightingale's Death Song" alter the poem's meaning in ways that are directly related to the nightingale and its association with melancholy. I will first discuss two appearances of the poem in the later nineteenth-century, and then consider the musical settings.

Philomela's Chorus

The poem was popular enough in the later years of the nineteenth century that a small section of it was included in an cultural overview of the rose and its history: Guy Ainslee's "Among the Roses" (1881), in a section on the lore of the nightingale and the rose. Ainslee prefaces his quotation of Hemans's first stanza with: "And Mrs. Hemans chants in tender verse the nightingale's death-song, whose burden is "Mournfully, sing mournfully [...]." Ainslee characterizes Hemans as "chanting" the nightingale's song, and, as we have already seen, the poem portrays the nightingale as singing its own song. Ainslee's description of Hemans "chanting" is not unusual: by this time, Hemans had already been all but canonized as a poetess, a "songbird" herself, a phenomenon this chapter will address in the coda.²⁸

The poem was also featured in the periodical *Current Literature*, in a section entitled "Philomela's Chorus: Songs of the Nightingale" (1896) by Fanny Mack Lothrop, a compilation of several nightingale-themed poems, including Keats's and Arnold's contributions on the topic. Like Ainslee's characterization of a "chanting" Hemans, Lothrop's title gathers the featured poets together in a "chorus." However, "Philomela's Chorus" does something quite different from "Among the Roses," by cutting out five stanzas of Hemans's poem: the stanzas beginning, "A

²⁸ Guy Ainslee. "Among the Roses." *Potter's American Monthly*, 17.115 (1881): 41. See also Tricia Lootens. *Lost Saints: Silence, Gender, and Victorian Literary Canonization*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996.

voice in every whisper,” the second “Mournfully, sing mournfully,” “Not so! —Swell forth triumphantly,” “Triumphantly, triumphantly!” and “The sky’s transparent azure” are all missing from “Philomela’s Chorus.” Lothrop presents not an excerpt of the poem, but a heavily condensed version, one that leaves out the crucial mood shift at the seventh stanza (“Not so!—Swell forth triumphantly”), as well as the “deep farewell tone” that precedes it. With most of the poem edited out, Lothrop’s version is radically changed: the nightingale’s triumphant turn at the poem’s end is effectively removed. This creates a different poem, one that adheres thematically to the mythical associations of the titular Philomela. Hemans’ nightingale is altered to fit into its cliché, standardized associations. As we will see, Lothrop’s 1896 version had more than one precedent in the poem’s musical settings.

Con Dolore

Previously, I have discussed the nightingale as a sound trope. Its associations stem from this basic attribute: it sings. It sings unbidden, unseen, under cover of night (or so it was thought in Hemans’s time); it is “nature’s music.”²⁹ The melancholy figure or poet speaker calls upon it to convey layers of meaning and emotion that can only be understood through the interface of human and animal music, and moreover, through a conception of acousmatic sound which, as I discuss elsewhere in this dissertation, is historically located, emerging in the late eighteenth century. In this section I demonstrate that the poetic figure of the nightingale—that is, a figure of sound—was cycled and recycled not only through poetry, but through sound and music.

In the third volume of the 1825 monthly music magazine *The Harmonicon*, a reader, “Clericus,” writes to the editor:

²⁹ See chapter one for a discussion of Robert Bloomfield’s 1808 pamphlet, *Nature’s Music. Consisting of Extracts from Several Authors: with Practical Observations, and Poetical Testimonies, in Honour of The Harp of Aeolus*. London: Printed for J. Swan, No. 76, Fleet Street. 1808.

Sir, — In reading lately William Jackson’s ingenious Essays, *The Four Ages*, I met with some observations which I consider as valuable; and as the work is extremely scarce, and there appears to be an increasing appetite for musical criticism in the reading part of the public, I have extracted the Essay for your use, if you think with me that it is worth reprinting. I am, &c,

CLERICUS.³⁰

The editors of *The Harmonicon* seemed to agree with Clericus, as they printed both the letter and the section from Jackson’s *The Four Ages*, “On the Joining Poetry with Music.” Jackson’s essay participates in an active debate (the piece begins, “In some late remarks on a musical publication, a wish is expressed, that the alliance of music and poetry were dissolved”).³¹ Jackson then argues that poetry and music should be combined when it is advantageous to do so, and that music can take on different meanings depending on the poetry: according to Jackson, poetry has “the power to determine what idea the music should express.”³² However, I demonstrate here that, in Hemans’s case, music had the power to determine the ideas the poetry expressed.

In his 1829 review of Hemans’ “The Forest Sanctuary,” Francis Jeffrey questions whether Hemans’s poetry will be “immortal,” yet he does so by linking poetic immortality to music: “[e]ven the splendid strains of Moore are fading into distance and dimness, except where they have been married to immortal music.” Jeffrey argues that there is no way to predict whether

³⁰ “On the Joining of Poetry with Music. To the Editor of the *Harmonicon*.” Ayrton, William. *The Harmonicon*. Ed. William Ayrton. Vol 3, pt 1. London: W. Pinnock [etc.], 1825. *The Harmonicon* :172.

³¹ *The Harmonicon*, 172.

³² Lawrence Kramer argues that “[w]hat really separates music from poetry is a complementarity in the roles that the two arts assign to their connotative and combinatory aspects: each art makes explicit the dimension that the other leaves tacit.” Additionally, “Carried by the singing voice, poetry approaches the source of creation by uniting with the ‘harmony’ that its words cannot express. (That is why poets habitually call poetry song when they want to represent it as vision epiphany, or prophecy).” Kramer suggests that the point of convergence at which we can profitably analyze music and poetry together is structural rhythm, the way each form organizes time. In this section however, I consider the ways a poem and its musical settings operate on their organization of tropes, that is, by their tropological logic. See Lawrence Kramer. *Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984: 6; 2. See also *The Harmonicon*, 172.

Hemans' work will be "immortal"—as even Keats, Shelley, Southey, and Wordsworth, he claims, are fading—yet also operates on an assumption about the nature of music.³³ In the context of the review, Jeffrey is not making a broad statement about music and poetry; he is speculating about Hemans' possible future fame by drawing a parallel with another well-known poet, Thomas Moore. Yet Jeffrey's statement is predicated on his assumption that music is "immortal"—a poetic preservative, at least, in the case of Moore's work. While other poems may fade, those that have been set to music can remain in the public mind.

It was a common practice for composers to set popular poetry to music. By the time John Lodge and others were creating musical arrangements of Hemans' work, and by the time Hemans wrote "The Nightingale's Death Song," she was already one of the best-known poets in Britain. Likely for this reason, numerous settings for Hemans's poetry exist, many by her sister, Harriet Browne. While much profitable work could and should be done on the multitude of Hemans settings, here, I will focus on the three known settings of "The Nightingale's Death Song" by John Lodge, George Kingsley, and C. Seemüller.

The earliest musical setting of the poem is that by John Lodge, which was first published in 1829, the same year the poem appeared in *The New Monthly Magazine* and many other periodicals. Lodge, later John Lodge Ellerton after he took his grandmother's maiden name in 1838,³⁴ was a well-known amateur composer and poet,³⁵ although Nicholas Temperley mentions his compositions were "more remarkable for quantity than quality," and that Lodge himself paid to have them published. Indeed, Lodge composed in virtually every genre, though his greatest

³³ Francis Jeffrey. "[Review of the second editions of *Records of Women* (1828) and *The Forest Sanctuary* (1829)]". *Edinburgh Review* 50 (1829)" in Felicia Hemans, and Susan J. Wolfson. *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Letters, Reception Materials*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000: 554.

³⁴ Hereafter Lodge, as that is how he was known during Hemans's life.

³⁵ Lodge published *The Bridal of Salerno*—a six-canto romance—in 1845 and *The Elixir of Youth*, assorted poems and a legend, in 1864. See John Warrack. "Ellerton, John Lodge." September 2004. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 15 March, 2018. doi-org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/10.1093/ref:odnb/8647

output was in chamber music.³⁶

We have already seen, in part from the letter to him during her visit with the Wordsworths discussed earlier in this chapter, that Hemans and Lodge were friends. They also had a productive musical relationship: Lodge wrote musical settings for several of Hemans's poems, and Hemans contributed lyrics to his compositions.³⁷ Lodge's setting of "The Nightingale's Death Song" was sung by Mrs. W. Knyvett on Thursday, October third at the 1833 Liverpool Music Festival. Lodge's lyric adaptation of Hemans's poem is included in the festival program, and the song is listed as an air, for "Piano-Forte accompaniment only." The song appeared on the first day of the two-day festival, "A Grand Miscellaneous Concert," which began with Beethoven's "Sinfonia in D" in part one and concluded with "God Save the King" in the second part.

Lodge's setting, like Kingsley's and Seemüller's, is arranged for solo voice and piano.³⁸ And, as Fanny Lothrop will do sixty-seven years later, Lodge drastically condenses the poem. However, his version includes the mid-poem mood shift, moving from the "deep farewell tone" to "Not so!" Lodge's version does not include the poem's full stanzas, and instead cuts them down to encapsulate the poem's movement from melancholy to triumph. A closer examination of the sheet music of Lodge's setting also reveals that not only does the lyric adaptation of "The Nightingale's Death Song" mirror the poem's mood shift, the music itself mimics the poem's emotional turn.

³⁶ According to Warrack, Wagner mentions Lodge in his autobiography, *Mein Leben*: "I was pleased...by a Mr Ellerton, a pleasant and dignified man [...] who was a poet, a music-lover, and, alas, a composer." See Nicholas Temperley. "John Lodge Ellerton." October 2003. *Grove Music Online*. 15 March, 2018. doi-org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.article.08727

See also John Warrack. "Ellerton, John Lodge." September 2004. *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 15 March, 2018. doi-org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/10.1093/ref:odnb/8647

³⁷ See Wolfson, 504 fn 1.

³⁸ John Lodge Ellerton. "The Nightingale's Death Song. Written by Mrs Hemans." London, 1829.

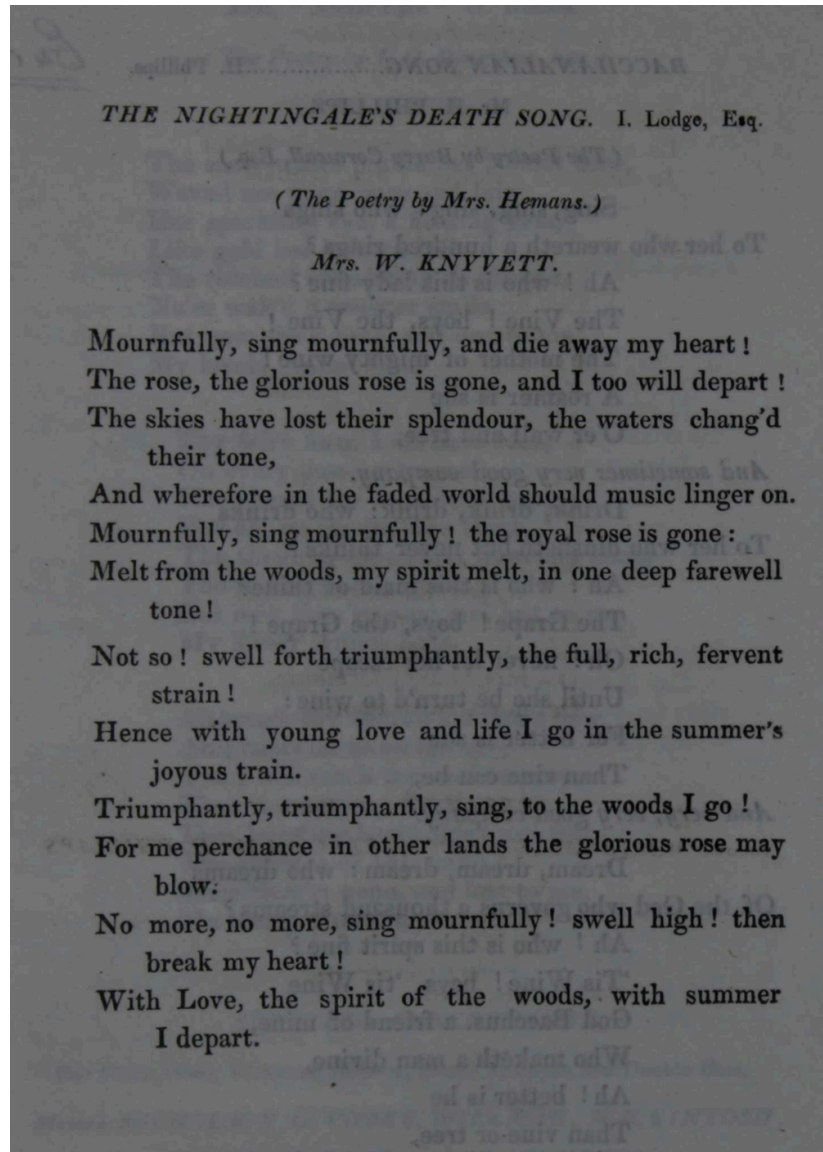


Figure 3.1: Lodge's lyric adaptation from the Liverpool Music Festival Program (1833).

<i>BACCHANALIAN SONG</i> , "The best of all good Company," Mr. H. Phillips	H. Phillips.
<i>AIR</i> , "The Nightingale's Death Song," Mrs. W. Knyvett, (Piano-Forte accompaniment only) J. Lodge.	
<i>ARIA</i> , "Tu vedrai la sventurata," Signor Donzelli.....	Bellina.
<i>TERZETTO</i> , "Vadaſi via di qua," Madame Malibran, Signor Donzelli, and Mr. H. Phillips	Martini.

Figure 3.2: Lodge's "The Nightingale's Death Song" listing in the Liverpool Music Festival Program (1833).³⁹

³⁹ *Liverpool Music Festival* (Program). 1833; Oct. 7. MS Sir George Smart Programmes. British Library. *Nineteenth Century Collections Online*. Web. 25 Aug. 2015.

Lodge's setting begins in E minor, with a tempo marking of *andante con moto*, that is, a moderately slow "walking" pace, with motion. However, midway through, the key shifts from E minor to E major, precisely at the poem's crucial turn: the transition from "deep farewell tone" (which at this point literalized in the vocal melody as a low B) to "Not so! Swell forth triumphantly." The tempo marking also changes at this point from *andante* to *allegretto*, a brisker pace.

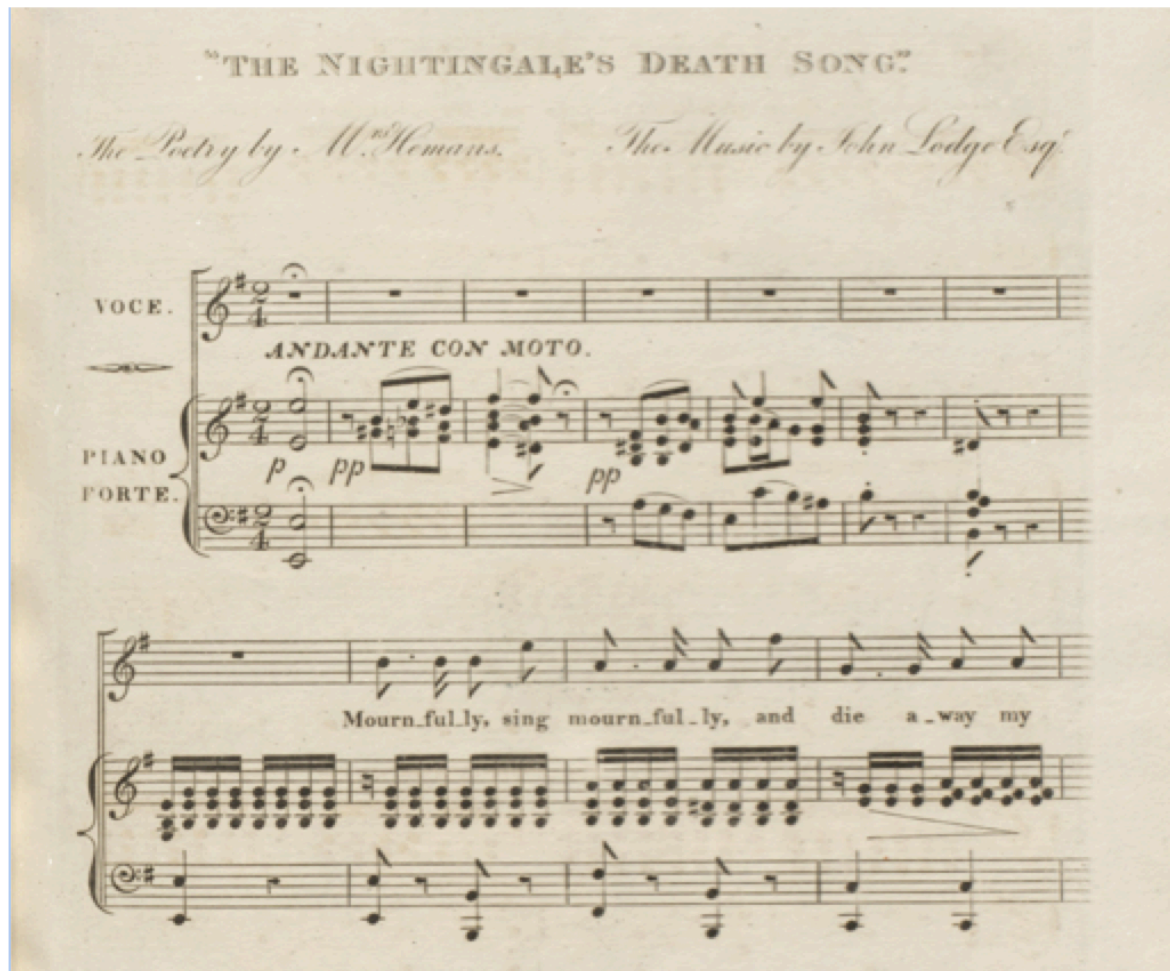


Figure 3.3: Lodge's setting, beginning in E minor. Courtesy of the British Library.⁴⁰



⁴⁰ The embedded sound file can be accessed via Adobe reader, otherwise, for the sound clip please visit: <https://aeolianresonance.wordpress.com/2016/01/16/john-lodge-the-nightingales-death-song-1829/>

Additionally, as the setting moves from major to minor, and from *andante* to *allegretto*, the piano accompaniment also abruptly shifts from a more elaborate arrangement of eighth and sixteenth notes to quarter note chords. This shift drastically changes the mood of the setting, from dramatic and solemn to an uplifting, march-like feel (see below):

The image displays a handwritten musical score on aged paper. The top system includes a vocal line with the lyrics "Melt! in one deep farewell tone." and a piano accompaniment marked *pp*. The bottom system is marked *Allegretto.* and *mf*, indicating a tempo and mood shift. The lyrics for the bottom system are "Not so! swell forth triumphant-ly, the full, rich, fervent". The score shows a key change to three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a change in the piano accompaniment from elaborate sixteenth-note patterns to simple quarter-note chords.

Figure 3.4: The third page of Lodge's setting, including lyric and mood shift, key and tempo changes. Courtesy of the British Library.⁴¹



⁴¹ The embedded sound file can be accessed via Adobe reader, otherwise, for the sound clip please visit: <https://aeolianresonance.wordpress.com/2016/01/16/john-lodge-the-nightingales-death-song-1829/>

In both key and tempo, Lodge mirrors Hemans's poem's theme of regeneration both lyrically and sonically. It is almost certain that this is the only musical setting of the poem that Hemans could have heard in her lifetime, and we do not know if she made any suggestions to Lodge regarding his setting.

Six years later, American George Kingsley tried his hand at "The Nightingale's Death Song," the result was featured in his songbook *The Social Choir*. Kingsley was an organist, music teacher, and composer of hymns, and published several books of music in addition to *The Social Choir*.⁴² The popular *Social Choir* (the mostly-secular counterpart to *The Sacred Choir*) ran to twelve editions. Kingsley writes in his introduction that "[g]reat care has been used in selecting and adapting to the pieces, poetry of a strictly moral character."⁴³

Kingsley's "The Nightingale's Death Song" also appeared in *The Boston Pearl* on May 23, 1835: one week after Hemans's death on May 16th of that year. Indeed, Kingsley's adaptation is a mournful one, as his setting does not condense the poem, as Lodge's does; instead, Kingsley truncates the poem, completely dropping the final six stanzas to end with "one deep farewell tone." Kingsley's setting in C major is also in 6/8 time, giving it a lilting quality. There is no key change as in Lodge's, which is consistent with Kingsley's portrayal of only the melancholy section of the poem. In addition, the word "tone" and its half-rhymes in this setting is always accompanied by a descending note. However, Kingsley's major-key setting belies its melancholy subject, and its simple movement renders Hemans's poem as a rather standard parlor song [Figure 3.5].

⁴² *The Sacred Choir*, *The Sunday School Singing Book* (1832), *The Harp of David* (1844), and *The Young Ladies' Harp* (1847).

⁴³ Kingsley. *The Social Choir*. 12th ed. Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1849. See also Hymnery.org.

THE NIGHTINGALE'S DEATH SONG.: POETRY BY MRS HEMANS SELECTED FROM THE SOCIAL CHOIR.
 Kingsley, Geo
The Boston Pearl, and Literary Gazette (1834-1835); May 23, 1835; 4, 37; American Periodicals
 pg. 300

THE NIGHTINGALE'S DEATH SONG.
POETRY BY MRS HEMANS -- MUSIC BY GEO. KINGSLEY.
 SELECTED FROM THE SOCIAL CHOIR.

Mournfully, sing mournfully, And die away my heart; The rose, the glorious rose is gone, And

ANDANTE ESPRESSIVO.

FINE.

I too will do - part. The skies have lost their splendor, The waters change their tone, And wherefore in the faded world, Should music linger on.

FINE.

D. C.

Where is the golden sunshine,
 And where the flowers that glow;
 And where the joy of the dancing leaves,
 And the fountain's laughing glow?

A voice in every whisper,
 Of the wave, the bough, the air,
 Comes asking for the beautiful,
 And moaning, 'where? O, where?!

Mournfully, sing mournfully,
 The royal rose is gone;
 Melt from the woods, my spirit, melt,
 In one deep farewell tone!

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Figure 3.5: Kingsley's setting from *The Boston Pearl*, May 23, 1835.⁴⁴



It is probable that Kingsley wrote his setting before Hemans's death; however, this setting's publication in *The Boston Pearl* links "The Nightingale's Death Song" with Hemans's passing, as Letitia Landon's "Stanzas on the Death of Mrs Hemans" does, which I will discuss later in this chapter. Kingsley's adaptation, then, repurposes the poem as an elegy, an occasional poem. Lodge wrote his setting while Hemans was still alive, the same year she published the poem, and his is the only adaptation that reflects the poem's mood shift. The next setting I will discuss, that

⁴⁴ The embedded sound file can be accessed through Adobe reader, otherwise, for the sound clip please visit: <https://aeolianresonance.wordpress.com/2016/01/16/george-kingsley-the-nightingales-death-song-1835/>

by C. Seemüller,⁴⁵ alters and truncates the poem even further.

Seemüller changes the title of his setting from “The Nightingale’s Death Song” to something that would perhaps be more dramatic and emotionally resonant, “Mournfully! Sing Mournfully!” adding exclamation points (in Hemans, there is only one exclamation point after the second “Mournfully, sing mournfully.” In addition, the font used for “Mournfully!” is rigid and bold, in all caps and with a shadow, as though it is hovering. The setting itself is akin to an afterimage or shadow of Hemans’s poem. This is followed by “The Nightingale’s Death-Song” in a delicate, unshadowed, flowing cursive. Surrounding the words are semi-circular lines that suggest an outward movement like rippling water, wind, or—especially in the center of the title—sound vibrations [Figure 3.6].



Figure 3.6: Title page of Seemüller's "Mournfully, Sing Mournfully! Or, The Nightingale's Death Song." Courtesy of the University of Michigan Music Library.

⁴⁵ Seemüller, C. "Mournfully! Sing Mournfully! Or, The Nightingale's Death Song." Baltimore: George Willig, Jr., 1846. While information exists on both Lodge and Kingsley, Seemüller remains a mysterious figure.

Seemüller's title page is indicative of the music that follows. The setting in B flat indicates *moderato* (a pace only slightly faster than Lodge's *andante* and Kingsley's *andantino*) as the tempo and *con dolore* (with sadness). In addition to the mood and tempo directions, Seemüller's time signature, 2/4 also works with the *moderato* tempo to give this setting a more formal mood than Kingsley [Figure 3.7].

3

MOURNFULLY, SING MOURNFULLY.

Moderato.

PIANO

Con dolore.

Mourn - fully, sing mourn - fully, And die away - my heart. The

Figure 3.7: The first bars of Seemüller's setting.⁴⁶



⁴⁶ The embedded sound clip can be accessed via Adobe reader, otherwise, for the sound clip please visit: <https://aeolianresonance.wordpress.com/2016/01/16/c-seemuller-the-nightingales-death-song-1846/>

Seemüller's setting not only truncates the poem, it concludes with an altered version of the poem's fifth stanza [Figure 3.8]:

Tell of the brightness parted,
Thou bee, thou lamb at play,
Thou lark, in thy victorious mirth,
*Ye too have passed away.*⁴⁷

Seemüller replaces Hemans's exclamation points with commas here. And the nightingale does not question whether or not the lark has passed away, as it does in Hemans's poem; here, it simply states that the lark has indeed gone.

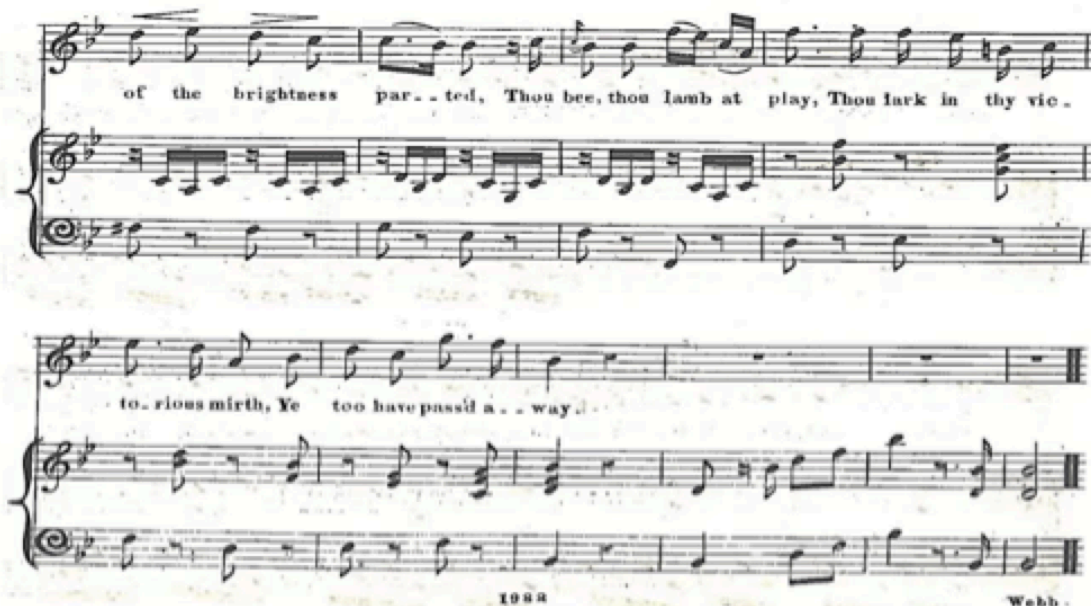


Figure 3.8: The final bars of Seemüller's setting.⁴⁸



⁴⁷ Emphasis mine.

⁴⁸ The embedded sound clip can be accessed via Adobe reader, otherwise, for the sound clip please visit: <https://aeolianresonance.wordpress.com/2016/01/16/c-seemuller-the-nightingales-death-song-1846/>

Because the song ends with an altered version of the “lark” stanza, the poem’s dramatic “deep farewell tone,” the pivotal moment that precedes the poem’s mood shift, is absent. In this way, Seemüller’s arrangement cuts the original poem severely, severing the last seven stanzas (or more than half) of the poem. Importantly, this alteration causes Seemüller’s song to conclude with the nightingale speaking to another songbird, the lark: “ye too have passed away.” The lark here, as in Hemans’s poem, isn’t actually in the nightingale’s presence, but in its purview, and ours: it is a symbol of happiness (also daytime and vision)—the nightingale’s supposed opposite (melancholy, night, and the unseen). In Hemans’s poem, the nightingale addresses the lark trope, a “stock-in-trade” item of the Lady Blessington persuasion, while transcending its own assigned status as such; the lark in Hemans’s poem is therefore a poetic touchstone, revealing the poem’s dramatic reconfiguration of the nightingale figure. However, because the Seemüller setting cuts off the final stanzas, this setting depicts one cliché addressing another, that is, by returning the nightingale to one of its most basic meanings (melancholy) this setting portrays the nightingale and the lark as the type of dropped-in mood indicators we see in the Lady Blessington poems with which this chapter opened.

Seemüller and Kingsley both restore the nightingale to its melancholy state, transforming Hemans’s poem into an elegy that does not continue on to the triumphant, Lycidian (or, Coleridgian) end as in the original poem. In Kingsley and Seemüller, the nightingale only departs (or dies). Kingsley and Seemüller’s songs take the nightingale trope back to its beginnings—the beginnings of which are the foundation for Hemans’s poem, and the only way her poem can alter the trope. The nightingale in Hemans’s poem, and to some extent in Lodge’s adaptation, is an agent; in Kingsley and Seemüller, the bird still narrates, yet its agency is diminished by its return

to a basic melancholic mood-indicator. In these two settings, Hemans's bird departs without destination. We only know that the bird *will* depart—we have no idea where. These adaptations demonstrate the plasticity not only of Hemans's poem, but of the nightingale trope itself. Ironically, Hemans's poem enacts this theme of metamorphosis, yet in Kingsley and Seemüller, the bird transforms back to the standardized state from which it breaks free in Hemans. The nightingale's mythical roots (the myth of Philomela and Procne),⁴⁹ make the nightingale itself a figure of metamorphosis.

The next sections will demonstrate that as the nightingale trope--and Hemans's posthumous reputation--enter into the later Victorian period, both shift in important ways: the nightingale figure seems to continue to self-correct (as we have seen in Kingsley and Seemüller), returning to its cliché, melancholy associations, while, as Hemans becomes the exemplar of the poetess, her image becomes itself more trope-like.

The Nightingale and the Snail

As Hemans was cycled and re-cycled through the Victorian period, editions, such as the 1873 edition of *The Poetical Works of Mrs. Felicia Hemans*, one in a series of poetry editions by William Michael Rossetti, recycled Hemans via the trope of the songbird. The Rossetti edition contains—along with large, full-page illustrations—small, decorative engravings by author and illustrator Thomas Secombe. Later editions like this one helped produce an image of Hemans, and of the songbird trope, that has been cycled and recycled, through the later nineteenth century.

⁴⁹ Philomela is raped by her sister Procne's husband, Tereus, who then cuts out Philomela's tongue to silence her. Procne and Philomela then kill Procne and Tereus's son, Itys, and serve him as a meal to Tereus as revenge. When Tereus discovers what he has eaten, he then attempts to kill Procne and Philomela, who ask the gods to turn them into birds. At this point, Philomela becomes a nightingale and Procne becomes a swallow (which does not sing). Though this myth itself has changed over time, and some sources have Philomela and Procne reversed (Philomela as the swallow—as her tongue was cut out--and Procne as the nightingale). See Jeni Williams. *Interpreting Nightingales: Gender, Class And Histories*. Sheffield: Academic Press, 1997: 36.

Seccombe's engravings include cottages, nature scenes without human or animal life (a single wave rolling in to shore, for example), and, more than any other theme, birds. When the edition is read as a whole, the placement of the bird images can be seen to inflect not only of the poems they accompany, but as commentary on Hemans's legacy, and how that legacy is linked with the songbird trope. There are four different bird engravings: the first to appear is that of a bird perched with wings spread on a leafy branch, looking as though it has just landed. Only sky and faint suggestions of clouds appear in the background. This bird's beak is open; however, if we follow its eyes, the bird appears not about to burst into song, but ready to devour a snail, who happens to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The second bird image to appear in the volume is clearly that of the nightingale. The medallion image is taken up almost entirely by tree branches, a full moon slightly visible behind the trees and through the clouds. The bird, perched on the largest branch to the right, has its head tilted upwards and beak open in song. The nightingale, unsurprisingly, since it was known as an unseen bird, is almost indistinguishable from the branches. The first time we see this image is on the last page of "The Forest Sanctuary."⁵⁰

Another portrays a bird perched on a branch above what appears to be a stream, with a small cottage, tree and hill in the background. This bird's beak is open—this is also a singing bird. The next engraving shows what seems to be the nightingale's nest: located on the ground among grasses and reeds, with the bird barely visible in the background.⁵¹ These two engravings portray the songbird trope as we've come to know it: singing, situated either in an idealized country landscape, or a standard evening scene with the moon, and importantly, frozen. The other

⁵⁰ Felicia Hemans, and William Michael Rossetti. *The Poetical Works of Mrs. Felicia Hemans*. London: Ward, Lock, and co. [1873?]: 38.

⁵¹ Hemans and Rossetti, xviii; 71; 112.

engravings suggest not only movement, but activities crucial to the birds' life cycle; that is, non-musical activities that have not been idealized as poetic tropes: hunting snails and laying eggs. Moreover, these two engravings reflect shifts in the cultural understanding and recycling of the trope of the songbird in the direction of new developments in natural science and literalizations of the songbird that occurred in the later Victorian period (that is, the bird is moving from symbolic to mimetic, and from metaphor to metonym)--developments that my next chapter will take up in detail.



Figure 3.9: Hunting bird from *The Poetical Works of Mrs. Hemans* (1873).⁵²

⁵² *Poetical Works*, xviii.



Figure 3.10: Songbird from *The Poetical Works of Mrs. Hemans*. (1873).⁵³



Figure 3.11: Nightingale's nest from *The Poetical Works of Mrs. Hemans* (1873).⁵⁴

⁵³ *Poetical Works*, 112.

⁵⁴ *Poetical Works*, 71.



Figure 3.12: Singing nightingale from *The Poetical Works of Mrs. Hemans* (1873).⁵⁵

“How Many Loved and Honored Thee”

Two months after Hemans’ death in May 1835, her contemporary,⁵⁶ Letitia Landon—better known as L.E.L.—published the poem, “Stanzas on the Death of Mrs. Hemans.”⁵⁷ First published in *The New Monthly Magazine* (44: July 1835), Landon’s poem⁵⁸ was then set to music

⁵⁵ *Poetical Works*, 38.

⁵⁶ And possible rival. See Lucy Morrison. “Effusive Elegies Or Catty Critic: Letitia Elizabeth Landon on Felicia Hemans.” *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*, 45. February 2007. <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/015820ar> 15 March, 2018.

⁵⁷ Landon herself died only three years later, in October 1838.

⁵⁸ Landon was not the only poet to memorialize Hemans, her “Stanzas on the Death of Mrs. Hemans” also provoked a parody response from Elizabeth Barrett, “Stanzas Addressed to Miss Landon, and Suggested by Her ‘Stanzas on the Death of Mrs Hemans.’” In addition, Wordsworth, in his “Extempore Effusion on the Death of James Hogg,” directs the final stanzas toward Hemans:

*Mourn rather for that holy Spirit,
Sweet as the spring, as ocean deep;
For Her who, ere her summer faded,
Has sunk into a breathless sleep.*

*No more of old romantic sorrows,
For slaughtered Youth or love-lorn Maid!
With sharper grief is Yarrow smitten,
And Ettrick mourns with her their Poet dead.*

in the same year by Alexander Roche with a new title: “How Many Loved and Honored Thee.”⁵⁹

The publication of Roche’s musical setting, which contains the poem itself (the musical arrangement follows), opens with an excerpt from the “Court Journal, July 4th 1835”:

“It is meet that one fair poet of the age should weave a garland
for the tomb of a departed Heaven-gifted sister of song. The tears
are not yet dry that we have shed for the loss of the all but divine,
the now immortal, Hemans; but Miss Landon, in a spirit-love, has
already commemorated her genius and her worth in verse of no
common pathos or power.”

Then, an epigraph: “‘The rose__the glorious rose is gone!’ Lays of Many Lands.”⁶⁰ Lucy Morrison claims that Landon’s epigraph “[evokes] the flower imagery resonant in Hemans’s ‘Bring Flowers’” (1824), however, the epigraph is actually taken from Hemans’s “The Nightingale’s Death Song.” While Landon’s first stanza does recall Hemans’ “Bring Flowers,” the fact that the epigraph comes from “The Nightingale’s Death Song” is significant. First, while it seems to link Hemans with the rose, it implicitly links Hemans and the Nightingale. Ryan claims that “Landon inserts herself into Hemans’ words, because the ‘rose’ must now be identified with the absent Hemans, leaving Landon as a voice that mourns, ‘And I, too, will depart.’” However, in “The Nightingale’s Death Song,” the nightingale is migrating to warmer

William Wordsworth. “Extempore Effusion on the Death of James Hogg.” *The Poetical Works of Wordsworth*. London and New York: Warne, 1875: 574. See also Sweet, *Chronology for Felicia Hemans and Her Circle*..

⁵⁹ See Wolfson, 571. The marketing of Hemans continued on the title page, which notes that Roche also set Hemans’ poem “My Gentle Child” to music. The notice states that this was “the last composition of that lamented Lady.”

⁶⁰ Wolfson notes that Landon misattributed the epigraph from “The Nightingale’s Death-Song” to *Lays of Many Lands*. After its 1829 publication in *The New Monthly Magazine*, it appeared in the miscellaneous section of *Songs of the Affections* (1830). Ryan also attributes it to *Lays of Many Lands* (1825), which was published with *The Forest Sanctuary*, but does not actually contain the poem. See Susan Wolfson. *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Letters, Reception Materials*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000: 573-74 fn.1; and Brandy Ryan. “‘Echo and Reply’: The Elegies of Felicia Hemans, Letitia Landon, and Elizabeth Barrett.” *Victorian Poetry* 46.3 (2008): 249-277.

climes.

Landon's use of "The Nightingale's Death Song" as epigraph to her memorial is at first ambiguous: does her excerpt sever the poem's thematics of regeneration (that is, Hemans's poem moves from death to life, melancholy to triumph, mirroring the changing seasons), or does it imply the Hemans herself, like her version of the nightingale, will live on? A closer examination of Landon's poem suggests the former.

The sixth stanza reads:

And yet thy song is sorrowful,
Its beauty is not in bloom;
The hopes of which it breathes, are hopes
That look beyond the tomb.
Thy song is sorrowful as winds
That wander o'er the plain,
And ask for summer's vanished flowers,
And ask for them in vain.

Here, Landon's poem characterizes Hemans's work as melancholy, and this stanza in particular evokes "The Nightingale's Death Song." Hemans's nightingale (in the first, melancholy section

of the poem) not only mourns the dying flowers at the end of summer, but asks after them:

"where the flower-cup's glow?" Landon likens Hemans's "song" to sorrowful winds that "ask for summer's vanished flowers...in vain." In the fourth stanza of "The Nightingale's Death Song" (the stanza following "the flower-cup's glow," the nightingale tells of the wind asking for "the beautiful":

A voice, in every whisper

Of the wave, the bough, the air,
Comes asking for the beautiful,
And moaning, “Where, oh! where?”

Landon describes both Hemans and her work in almost exclusively musical language (“a music of thine own,” “wound to a pitch too exquisite,/The soul’s fine chords are wrung,” “The spirit’s inmost chords,” to name only three examples). While Landon’s poem does at first evoke Hemans’s “Bring Flowers,” “Stanzas on the Death of Mrs Hemans” is highly allusive to “The Nightingale’s Death Song.” And yet, like the musical settings created after Hemans’s death (Kingsley and Seemüller), Landon’s poem is strictly melancholy, not regenerative. In addition to the melancholy tone throughout the poem, Landon’s “Stanzas” do not end triumphantly. Her final lines are, “But the quick tears are in my eyes, / And I can write no more.” Hemans here is memorialized in a poem that operates on a strong musical motif and, in Roche’s setting of Landon’s poem, with music and sound itself.

Alexander Roche was a fairly well-known composer, and his work was reviewed in music periodicals like *The Harmonicon*.⁶¹ As with the musical settings of “The Nightingale’s Death Song,” Landon’s one hundred and twelve-line, fourteen-stanza poem is severely condensed and reworked by Roche, whose lyric adaptation reads:

Bring flow’rs to crown the cup and lute,
Bring flow’rs the bride is near;
Bring flow’rs to soothe the captives cell,
Bring flow’rs to strew the bier!
Bring flow’rs this said the lovely song;

⁶¹ Roche composed several musical settings, although, like Seemüller, he remains mysterious. We know he lived in County Cork, and hosted several concerts there.

And shall they not be brought
To her who link'd the offering
With feeling and with thought?
With feeling and with thought?
With feeling and with thought?

Bring flow'rs,--the perfum'd and the pure,
Those with the morning dew,
A sigh in ev'ry fragrant leaf,
A tear on ev're hue.
So pure, so sweet thy life has been,
So filling life and air
With odours and with loveliness,
Til common scenes grew fair,
Till common scenes grew fair,
Till common scenes grew fair.

How many loved and honor'd thee
Who only knew thy name;
Which o'er the weary working world
Like starry music came
Oh, weary one! Since thou art laid
Within thy mother's breast

The green, the quiet mother earth

Thrice blessed be thy rest!

Thrice blessed be thy rest!

Thrice blessed be thy rest!⁶²

Roche's setting cuts the majority of Landon's poem, leaving only the first, second, and twelfth stanzas. Additionally, the final verse of the arrangement, based on the poem's twelfth stanza, is further altered. In Landon's poem it reads:

How many loved and honored thee

Who only knew thy name;

Which o'er the weary working world

Like starry music came!

With what still hours of calm delight

Thy songs and image blend;

I cannot choose but think thou wert

An old familiar friend.⁶³

It is Landon's fourteenth (and final) stanza that begins "Oh, weary one!"; Roche's setting therefore splices the twelfth and fourteenth stanzas of Landon to create the final verse of "How Many Loved and Honored Thee." In this way, both Landon's poem and Roche's setting are consonant with the later musical adaptations of "The Nightingale's Death Song." Landon's poem in particular, in its allusiveness to Hemans's poem, both characterizes Hemans herself as the

⁶² Landon, Letitia Elizabeth Landon, and Alexander D. Roche. *"how Many Loved and Honored Thee". Written by Miss L. E. Landon, on the Death of MRS. Hemans, and Set to Music by Alexr. D. Roche.* 1st ed. London: Published by J. Dean, 148 New Bond Street, 1835.

⁶³ Landon and Hemans were contemporaries, but there is no evidence that they were friends or acquaintances. For more on their relationship see Lucy Morrison. "Effusive Elegies Or Catty Critic: Letitia Elizabeth Landon on Felicia Hemans." *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net* 45 (2007). February 2007. <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/015820ar> 15 March, 2018.

nightingale, and in so doing restores the nightingale figure to its clichéd status as a symbol of melancholy conceptualized through music and sound.



Figure 3.13: Landon and Roche's "How Many Loved and Honored Thee" (1835). Image courtesy of Chawton House Library.

“Thy Songs and Image Blend”

As I read an original publication of the Landon/Roche “How Many Loved and Honored Thee,” in the reading room of Chawton House Library, I discovered a strange and haunting image. At first glance, the image above could be a simple line drawing of a woman’s face, with a slight suggestion of neck, shoulders, and dress. However, turning the page over reveals an engraving of Felicia Hemans. The image below is the resulting bleed-through of some unknown hand, at an unknown location in the past, tracing over the contours of the engraving. The varying thicknesses and pooling spots on the dark-brown line indicate either pen and ink or a fountain pen. Because the contours are clearly shaped by bleeding ink from the other side of the page, not a pen-stroke on the page’s surface, this image, first seen, seems to emerge from inside the page itself, seemingly without origin.



Figure 3.14: Ink bleed-through image of Hemans from "How Many Loved and Honored Thee" (1835). Image courtesy of Chawton House Library.

The engraving of Hemans on the previous page offers more information:



Figure 3.15: Engraving after a bust of Hemans from "How Many Loved and Honored Thee" (1835). Image courtesy of Chawton House Library.

Even the second image of Hemans appears as a symbol of the trope of the poetess. The engraving and bleed-through form a kind of mise-en-abyme, in which the trope of the poetess is constantly figured and emerging as both originless and fixed in history.

The anonymously written "Literary Sketches No. 1: Felicia Hemans," in the February 1831 *Athenaeum*,⁶⁴ characterizes the poem "The Nightingale's Death Song" itself as originless:

All who remember "The Voice of Spring" — "Bring Flowers" — "The Death-Song of the Nightingale" — "The Music of Yesterday" — "The Song of Night," and others of this class,

⁶⁴ Vol. 172 (12 February 1831):105-5. See Wolfson, 562.

will agree, that “the imperfection of language, the embarrassment of versification, all that is material and mechanical, disappears, and the vision floats before us ‘an aery stream’”

They seem like some of Shelley’s —less written than dreamed.⁶⁵

“Less written than dreamed” also recalls Hemans’s description of Wordsworth’s random recitations, like the songbird, Wordsworth’s utterances, for Hemans, seemed to spring unbidden from everywhere and nowhere.

According to Tricia Lootens, “Victorians tended to create a feminine canonicity whose most glorious monuments were doomed to collapse under their own weight.”⁶⁶ Hemans, in these images, and in Landon’s poem (and Roche’s setting), returns to a state of originlessness, like the nightingale’s song, or the sounds of the Aeolian harp. Lootens continues, “More like *pâpier-maché* than marble, the metaphoric figures of such canonized nineteenth-century women poets were shaped around vacancy: if their literary ‘relics’ were revered, it was not as embodiments but as representations of a transcendent and definitively absent feminine glory.” Applying Lootens’s argument to the *Athenaeum* review, we can read the disappearance of the “material and mechanical,” as the *Athenaeum* reviewer puts it, as indicative of the “vacancy” that metaphorical, troped women poets were “shaped around” (the mechanism disappears, the music remains). I do not seek to dispute Lootens’s compelling argument, but rather to add that this particular review in the *Athenaeum* discusses Hemans’s work (and Shelley’s) in a manner that both obscures the work’s origins, yet retains its praise of the author. Stating that the poems seem “less written than dreamed” is to perform the obscuration of origins that I discuss in my first chapter, with respect to Aeolian harp poetry that attempts to erase the source of the sound, all the while apostrophizing

⁶⁵ Excerpt in Wolfson, 566. Wolfson mentions that the quotation “aery stream” is unattributed, but may refer to the lines in Milton’s *Il Pèneroso* “let some strange mysterious dream/Wave at his Wings in airy stream” (568 fn 16).

⁶⁶ See Tricia A. Lootens. *Lost Saints: Silence, Gender, And Victorian Literary Canonization*. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1996: 10.

it.

This chapter has shown that Hemans's poem, during her lifetime, characterized the nightingale as a cyclical, regenerative figure, and that this characterization rested on a foundation of commonplaces about the poetic songbird. The nightingale was a figure associated with and conceptualized through sound and music, whose song was understood to come from everywhere and nowhere, as it was thought to sing only at night, and unseen. Its melancholy associations provide the baseline for Hemans's reconfiguration of the trope, yet after Hemans's death, periodical adaptations and musical settings (including Landon's tribute), further reworked (or, undid) Hemans's reconstruction of the figure. For the reading publics of the later nineteenth century, as Hemans herself moved further away from a historical person and closer to an image or even ideal of the poetess (a secular canonization "shaped around vacancy" according to Lootens), the more the poem associated with her passing, "The Nightingale's Death Song" became altered, returning the musical figure of the nightingale to its well-known poetic associations, and this happened most often through the medium of music itself.

Chapter 4 : Acousmatic Sound and the Poetic Songbird Preserved

Thursday Night at the Opera. Sept[ember] 27, 1804. [I]n reflecting on the cause of the 'meeting soul' in music, the seeming recognizance, &c &c, the whole explication of memory as in the nature of accord struck upon me/ accord produces a phantom of memory, because memory is always an accord.

--Coleridge, 1804¹

"...Like everything else, nightingales are not what they used to be."

—Beryl Rowland²

Acousmatic Reverie

This dissertation has discussed the boilerplate poetic tropes of the songbird and the Aeolian harp as figures of the acousmatic. My previous chapter, on Hemans, suggested that Hemans's poem, "The Nightingale's Death Song" attempts to reconfigure the melancholy associations of the nightingale, only to have this reconfiguration undercut by musical settings of the poem written after Hemans's death, reconfiguring the nightingale's song as elegiac. While that chapter focused on the nightingale's (and Hemans's) afterlives in musical settings, this chapter will examine the poetic songbird and its musical resonances via the literal afterlives of birds in Victorian taxidermy, in which the figure of the songbird becomes an elegy for itself.

¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge. *Coleridge's Notebooks: A Selection*. Ed. Seamus Perry. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002: 68.

² Beryl Rowland. *Birds with Human Souls*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1978.

Previously, I argue that the poetic songbird's sounds and the imagined scenes of listening that accompany them in the poetry are what underlie the functioning of this sentimental cliché; these sounds involve the imagination of their characteristics and origins (or, rather, the sounds' lack of origins: the acousmatic). The figure of the poetic songbird shifted in the later years of the nineteenth century.³ In this chapter, I read bird taxidermy specifically as part of the songbird's reconfiguration and literalization. While I approach the songbird and its reconfiguration in taxidermy with respect to sound, I also consider what happens when the invisible poetic songbird is made visible: preserved as a material manifestation of an already commodified and clichéd sentimental trope. The body of the unseen songbird is now on display, yet its song is only a memory, or the imagination of remembered sound.

Taxidermied animals are pieces of nature, frozen, removed from their living habitats and surroundings (though they may be placed in new "natural" environments consisting of branches, silk flowers, leaves, or shells), and one of the defining characteristics of preserved animals is their silence. Yet despite their silence, they give voice to imaginings of the songbird trope. As other scholars⁴ have also observed, Susan Stewart's argument about the souvenir is particularly suited to the consideration of taxidermy: "[t]he souvenir must be removed from its context in order to serve as a trace of it, but it must also be restored through narrative and/or reverie."⁵ That is, in the context of this chapter, the viewer must supply her own reverie or narrative for the taxidermied animal she regards. In this chapter I consider the ways in which the Victorians imbued taxidermied animals—specifically, taxidermied birds—with ideas about sound and

³ See Jeni Williams *Interpreting Nightingales: Gender, Class and Histories*. Sheffield: Academic Press, 1997: 150-151.

⁴ See, for example, Rachel Poliquin. *The Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012, and Conor Creaney. "Paralytic Animation: The Anthropomorphic Taxidermy of Walter Potter Author." *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (Autumn 2010), pp. 7-35.

⁵ See Susan Stewart. *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1993: 150.

music, and how this creates a separate, more multifaceted figure, by examining manifestations of the taxidermied bird in poetry, an anthropomorphic taxidermy tableau, domestic taxidermy, and mechanized as a singing bird automaton.

Bird taxidermy literalizes the figure of the poetic, musical songbird, and yet, this literalization serves to create yet another figure that encompasses but also extends beyond the poetic representation. In a poem like Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale," which I discuss at greater length later in this chapter, the poetic songbird serves as a metaphor, whereas it has a metonymic relation to the taxidermied bird, only a part of the whole that signifies (and evokes) it. To illustrate how this metonymy works, I turn first to Thomas Hardy's 1917 poem, "In a Museum," which I will quote in full:

I.

Here's the mould of a musical bird long passed from light,
Which over the earth before man came was winging;
There's a contralto voice I heard last night,
That lodges with me still in its sweet singing.

II

Such a dream is Time that the coo of this ancient bird
Has perished not, but is blent, or will be blending
Mid visionless wilds of space with the voice that I heard,
In the full-fuged song of the universe unending.⁶

Here, Hardy's narrator contemplates a preserved bird, prompting the memory of music. The narrator is likely in a natural history museum; the poem perhaps reflects evolutionary knowledge

⁶ Thomas Hardy. "In a Museum" *Moments of Vision And Miscellaneous Verses*. London: Macmillan and co., limited, 1917.

or the knowledge of deep time, and though the bird existed “before man came,” it eventually prompts the memory of a human music. And yet the first type of music the narrator notices is the bird’s own musical ability (or, the ability it had when it was alive). The narrator goes on to insist that the bird’s song has “perished not”—it lives, the poem suggests, in the taxidermied bird’s ability to provoke the memory of music in those who view the bird. The fact of the bird’s visibility (it is designed specifically to be looked at by both its preservation and its placement in a museum) prompts the imagination of invisible, or even inaudible, music.

The poem, appearing in Hardy’s *Moments of Vision* draws attention to the visible and invisible: the unseen music of the bird and the “contralto voice” meet in the “visionless wilds of space.” While the narrator has actually heard the singer’s voice, they have not actually heard the sound of the “musical bird” on display. However, the bird is preserved both in the sense that it has been taxidermied, and in the sense that the memory and imagination of the birdsong associated with it are also preserved. The imagination of sound here is a multi-layered imagining: it involves the actual sound of birds and the cultural, poetic associations of the songbird trope. Hardy reflected on these associations in other poems, notably “The Darkling Thrush, long understood as Hardy’s turn-of-the-century characterization of a Romanticism “grown old.”⁷ Yet “The Darkling Thrush,” too, comments on the bird via sound, and, like “In a Museum” also makes the bird visible:

At once a voice outburst among
The bleak twigs overhead
In a full-hearted evensong
Of joy illimited;

⁷ Charles E. May. “Hardy’s ‘Darkling Thrush’: The ‘Nightingale’ Grown Old.” *Victorian Poetry*, 11.1 (1973): 62-65.

An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and small,
In a blast-beruffled plume,
Had chosen thus to fling his soul
Upon the growing gloom.⁸

The narrator hears the bird first, and then sees it after. The “frail, gaunt, and small” thrush, in contrast to the invisible poetic nightingale, is both seen and described by the narrator who hears its song; the thrush’s joyful tune serves to underscore the poem’s melancholy and bleakness. The wind is also made visible here in the bird’s ruffled feathers (its “blast-beruffled plume”). By making both the wind and an aged version of the poetic nightingale visible, “The Darkling Thrush,” importantly, makes visible the acousmatic sounds of the Romantics—the Aeolian harp (wind) and the songbird, while at the same time cutting off the narrator from their power to express or represent his emotions.

Previously, I have explored the ways Aeolian harp and bird poetry work to emphasize the acousmatic by enacting an erasure of the sounds’ source, often while simultaneously apostrophizing that source.⁹ Characteristic poems about the Aeolian harp or the songbird work to obscure what Michel Chion calls “identified listening” that is, “when vision, naming, logical deduction, or any other means of identification offers the auditor the means of recognizing—or of believing he has recognized—the source of the sound to which he listens.”¹⁰ Conversely, Hardy’s “The Darkling Thrush” works to unveil the sound’s source. Therefore, Hardy’s poem works in the opposite direction: it moves from acousmatic hearing (“At once a voice outburst among/ The bleak twigs overhead”) to “identified listening” (“An aged thrush, frail, gaunt, and

⁸ Thomas Hardy. “The Darkling Thrush.” *Poems of the Past And the Present*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1902: 169-171.

⁹ See Chapter One, “Aeolian Resonance.”

¹⁰ Michel Chion, and James A. Steintrager. *Sound: an Acoulogical Treatise*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016: 112.

small”). It is in this way too that “The Darkling Thrush” laments, or, even exposes, the end of Keats’s and Shelley’s era.

While the thrush, though aged and frail, is alive and able to produce its song, the taxidermied bird considered in “In a Museum” is idealized, evoking not only Keats’s nightingale, but also his “unheard melody.” By contrast, “The Darkling Thrush” offers an example of failed reverie: the thrush sings a joyful song and knows of “some blessed Hope” of which Hardy’s narrator is “unaware.” The narrator here experiences a disconnect, not only from the bird, but from the poetic trope: he does not, and cannot, call on the living, yet aged, bird to represent his own emotions—the bird cannot act as a metaphor for hope.¹¹ The thrush allows Hardy to look back on the poetic productions of the Romantic period, yet the taxidermied bird of “In a Museum,” written seventeen years later, returns, not to the Romantic nightingale, but instead to the figure of the songbird literalized as taxidermy in the later nineteenth century. The “mould of a musical bird” in “In a Museum” is, after Stewart, “removed from its context in order to serve as a trace of it,”¹² the narrator, or, the poem itself, is able to provide a reverie, a context for the bird, and that reverie is one of sound.

Importantly, “In a Museum,” in restoring the bird’s narrative, in fact restores the reverie of a reverie: “In a Museum” presents a figure of a figure. To explain this, I return first to Stewart on the souvenir:

Nature is arranged diachronically through the souvenir; its synchrony and atemporality are manipulated into a human time and order. The pressed flowers under glass speak to

¹¹ See also Williams, who notes that “The Darkling Thrush” is essentially Hardy’s “Dover Beach” (and that “Dover Beach” only references Keats’s nightingale though the use of the word “darkling”): “It is a bizarre testimony to the inescapable allusiveness of the nightingale that, on the eve of the new century Hardy should choose to rewrite Arnold’s magnificent hopelessness in ‘The Darkling Thrush’ by replacing the unspoken [in Arnold] figure of the nightingale with an old and battered bird which stands doggedly outside the human world and cannot—unlike its poetic forerunner—be twisted into its reflection”: 154-55.

¹² Stewart, 150.

the significance of their owner in nature and not to themselves in nature. They are a sample of a larger and more sublime nature, a nature differentiated by human experience, by human history.¹³

We can read taxidermy as nature “manipulated into a human time,” and consider it with respect to what Stewart calls the “broader tendency to place all things natural at one degree of removal from the present flow of events and thereby to objectify them.”¹⁴ Hardy’s “In a Museum,” on the other hand, posits an idea of infinite, synchronous time. The taxidermied bird was once an objectified figure at “one degree of removal from the present flow of events,” yet Hardy’s poem presents this bird at yet another remove, making of it a new figure, one that provokes, or, is defined by, a reverie of its previous lives: that of a living creature able to produce song, a poetic trope (Shelley’s “bird that never wert”), and its existence as a preserved bird serving as a reminder of imagined song. By returning the “coo of [the] ancient bird” to the “visionless wilds of space,” Hardy restores the taxidermied bird’s (imagined) song to the realm of the acousmatic.

While Hardy’s taxidermied bird in “In a Museum” evokes the imagination of sound, it itself, of course, remains silent. In taxidermy’s paradox, the frozen and silent preserved figures attempt to simulate the sense of life, yet in so doing underscore the presence of death: the dramatic intertwining and perhaps even the dialectical relation between sound and silence, life and death, is re-inscribed in taxidermied figures (Hardy’s bird has “long passed from light” yet its song “has perished not”). Here, the taxidermied bird more than accomplishes its task of appearing lifelike: it evokes two types of unheard song: one a memory (the contralto voice), and one imagined (birdsong).

¹³ Stewart, 151.

¹⁴ Stewart also notes that “[t]he only proper context for the souvenir is the displacement of reverie, the gap between origin/object/subject which fields desire,” that is, distance in space and time gives rise to desire, or nostalgia: 150.

Hardy's poem reminds us that, even within the spaces of museums, preserved birds didn't solely operate as natural history specimens; they evoked the memory of song, or, more appropriately, the imagined memory of song. While the birds' (especially the nightingale's) placement in poetry often served as shorthand for an already-known and complex set of associations and emotions,¹⁵ the preserved bird serves, in part, as a literalization of this trope. Importantly, the songbird, (again, especially the nightingale), is often invisible or unseen in the poetry, while the taxidermied bird is brought into the realm of visibility: the bird is not simply seen, it is designed to be seen, its visibility set in relief and highlighted by its placement as display, in a case or cabinet; its purpose is to be looked at and examined, perhaps exhibiting a self-consciousness or awareness about the shifting trope of the songbird.

Poor Cock Robin

But of all birds I most detest to see the nightingale encaged--& the Swallow & the Cuckoo, -- motiveless! monstrous! -- but the Robin—o woe! woe! woe! he, sweet cock my head & eye, pert-bashful darling, that makes our kitchens its chosen Cage—

--Coleridge, 1808¹⁶

Scholarship has explored the Victorians' particular fascination with taxidermy in general. Jenny Pyke, for example, argues that Victorian taxidermy represents "wildness possessed" and "wildness and utter silence and stillness in one space,"¹⁷ and suggests that taxidermy represented more than anxieties about new scientific developments: for Pyke, taxidermy represents a Victorian "desire for stillness," and that "[t]he taxidermied animal allows energy and stillness to

¹⁵ Williams, 143.

¹⁶ Samuel Taylor Coleridge. *Coleridge's Notebooks: A Selection*. Ed. Seamus Perry. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002: 103.

¹⁷ See Jenny Pyke. "Charles Dickens and the Cat Paw Letter Opener" *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*. Open Library of Humanities. 2014: 2

coexist.”¹⁸ Silence, Pyke reminds us, is a crucial aspect of taxidermy. Yet while preserved animals, by virtue of their silence and stillness, immediately remind us of their lack of life, one of taxidermy’s primary goals is to create or preserve the semblance of life.

Victorian novelty and anthropomorphic taxidermy in particular has received scholarly attention for the ways in which it potentially demonstrates not only Victorian anxieties about science and theology (Jeni Williams points out that these anxieties are also part of the nightingale trope’s metamorphosis over the nineteenth century)¹⁹, but for the ways that it, as Rachel Youdelman puts it, and “[a]ll works of taxidermy, but especially anthropomorphic figures, evoke dual emotions of discomfort and fascination, an aesthetic experience akin to what Edmund Burke and others described as the aesthetic sublime.”²⁰ As Rachel Poliquin argues, contemplation of taxidermied animals, in the nineteenth century, “aroused a poetic sensibility,” due in part to a “romantic branch of natural history” inspired by poets such as Wordsworth and Shelley (Poliquin notes that many natural history works of the nineteenth century were prefaced with lines by Wordsworth, or with other poetical tributes to nature).²¹ Poliquin rightly points out that regarding taxidermy entails “the recognition that [taxidermy] is no mute and manufactured object,” but is “an aesthetic encounter with animal form.”²² Hardy’s “In a Museum” performs this moment of encounter and recognition, yet, importantly, the encounter happens through imagined sound, not the bird’s beauty. Williams reminds us that “[d]espite Coleridge’s (disingenuous) protestation, the figure [of the nightingale] has never evoked a ‘real’ nature. As

¹⁸ See Pyke, 3.

¹⁹ Williams suggests there are correspondences between medieval nightingale poetry and Victorian nightingales, noting “shared ideological instability,” and a “shared anxiety about their positions within their respectively changing worlds: 150-151. For a discussion of the medieval and classical models of nightingale poetry, see my first chapter.

²⁰ Rachel Youdelman. “Iconic Eccentricity: The Meaning of Victorian Novelty Taxidermy,” *PsyArt* 21 (2017):55.

²¹ Poliquin, 49. See also Judith Pascoe. “The Hummingbird Cabinet.” *The Wordsworth Circle*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2004: 31.

²² Poliquin, 50.

both he and Shelley realized, it has always been associated with poetry and passion, an association which became far more evident as the nineteenth century progressed.”²³

This chapter therefore, takes as its subject the poetic resonances of taxidermy.

Anthropomorphic taxidermy has received much scholarly attention, perhaps in part because of the ways twenty-first-century sensibilities with respect to animals and death differ from those of the Victorian period.²⁴ Conor Creaney points out that, as cultural acceptance of taxidermy shifted, “[m]anipulating animal bodies to make them seem to represent themselves as miniature humans was now often read as an unacceptable over-writing of their primary identities.”²⁵ Yet the songbird has always been over-written. The work of taxidermist Walter Potter in particular has garnered fame and scholarly attention for its darkly whimsical themes (a kitten’s wedding party, for example) and Potter’s meticulous craftsmanship and attention to detail. Potter’s anthropomorphic taxidermy tableau, “The Original Death and Burial of Cock Robin”(1861), has also been much discussed in scholarship, yet scholarly investigations of Potter’s “Cock Robin” have not examined the work within the realm of poetry and song.²⁶ In addition, while Potter’s

²³ Williams refers to Coleridge’s conversation poem on the nightingale (which suggests that the figure should be a joyous one, rather than melancholy), and to Shelley’s claim that “the poet is a nightingale.” Williams: 154. See also Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “The Nightingale” *Coleridge’s Poetry and Prose*. W.W. Norton & Company, 2004. and Percy Bysshe Shelley. “A Defence of Poetry.” *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose*. Ed. Reiman et al. W.W. Norton & Company, 2002: 529-535.

²⁴ Youdelman’s argument that taxidermy evokes the sublime, “a sensation we recognize as emotional ambivalence—a struggle between delight and terror,” reflects these differences: “terror,” in particular, may be an emotion more suited to present-day fascination with nineteenth-century taxidermy, rather than a sentiment the Victorians might have shared. Youdelman, 55.

²⁵ Conor Creaney. Paralytic Animation: The Anthropomorphic Taxidermy of Walter Potter Author.” *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (Autumn 2010): 7. Creaney is also interested in the literalizing power of taxidermy, particularly with respect to Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend*, and the “worrying of boundaries between literal and figurative, living and dead” in that novel—which features Mr. Venus, the taxidermist’s, shop--and how anthropomorphized taxidermied animals are “haunted” by their former, “real” selves (as animals in nature). On the other hand, I am interested, here, in how the literalizing power of taxidermy *creates* the figurative, and how taxidermied birds (anthropomorphic and non-anthropomorphic) are metonyms for, and imbued with, the figure of the poetic songbird.

²⁶ There are several musical arrangements of “Who Killed Cock Robin.” See The Vaughn Williams Memorial Library: <https://www.vwml.org/search?q=Who%20killed%20Cock%20Robin&is=1>

tableau is anthropomorphic, it actually replicates and literalizes the anthropomorphism that already exists in the ballad of Cock Robin.

Potter's tableau contains ninety-eight birds arranged and dressed to play their corresponding roles from the ballad and nursery rhyme, "Who Killed Cock Robin," alternately titled, "The Death and Burial of Cock Robin,"²⁷ the lyrics of which form a virtual list of animals, rendering it particularly suited to a taxidermy tableau [Figure 4.1].²⁸ The rhyme details the death of Cock Robin, who, shot by the Sparrow, is then mourned and buried by the other birds and animals:

Who killed Cock Robin?

I, said the Sparrow,

With my bow and arrow,

I killed Cock Robin.

Who saw him die?

I, said the Magpie,

With my little eye,

I saw him die.

Who caught his blood?

I, said the Fish

With my little dish,

²⁷ See Creaney, 24; See also Pat Morris and Joanna Ebenstein. *Walter Potter's Curious World of Taxidermy*. New York: Blue Rider Press, 2014: 47; and Iona and Peter Opie. *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952: 133.

²⁸ Fortey, W. S. *The Death And Burial of Cock Robin*. London: Printed and published at W.S. Fortey's Wholesale Juvenile Book Warehouse, 2 & 3, Monmouth Court, Bloomsbury, 1860.

I caught his blood.

The song continues through a list of animals who will dig Cock Robin's grave, make his shroud, mourn for him, perform the funeral, and toll the bell. Its final stanza usually reads:

All the birds in the air

Began sighing and sobbing

When they heard the bell toll

For poor Cock Robin.²⁹

The events of the song are told through the voices of birds and other animals. The final stanza in particular evokes the acousmatic with "All the birds in the air"; their "sighing and sobbing," and certainly evokes the melancholy associations of the nightingale. The birds here lament not only the death of Cock Robin, but potentially the death of birdsong (in the form of Cock Robin). Cock Robin's song is replaced by the tolling of the bell.

Considered Potter's masterwork, "The Original Death and Burial of Cock Robin"³⁰ is an example of bird taxidermy specifically referencing and evoking sound and poetry. Indeed, the entire rhyme is printed on the tableau's case.³¹ Poliquin, also building on Stewart's arguments, suggests that Potter's work is "iconic of a peculiar Victorian obsession with denaturalized nature" and that "[l]ost yet glorified, nature became an icon of itself."³² Measuring sixty-two by seventy-four by twenty inches,³³ the "Cock Robin" case is large, yet its contents work to collapse the story of "Who Killed Cock Robin," presenting the events of the song as happening more or

²⁹ Although the Rusher version contains two more stanzas at the end, noting that the Sparrow is now on trial for murder. See *Death and Burial of Cock Robin*. Banbury : Printed by J.G. Rusher, ca. 1840.

³⁰ Potter renamed the work in 1869 adding "Original," as other taxidermists appropriated "Who Killed Cock Robin" in their tableaux. Morris, 48.

³¹ Morris, *Curious World*: 50.

³² Rachel Poliquin. *The Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and Cultures of Longing*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012: 190.

³³ See Morris, *Curious World*: 47.

less simultaneously, although in the tableau, the Sparrow has already shot the arrow, and Cock Robin is in his coffin.



Figure 4.1: Walter Potter. "The Original Death and Burial of Cock Robin" (1861). Photo by Joanna Ebenstein.³⁴

³⁴ Pat Morris and Joanna Ebenstein. *Walter Potter's Curious World of Taxidermy*. New York: Blue Rider Press, 2014: 46.

The birds in the upper portion of the case potentially represent the ballad's final stanza as "all the birds in the air," that began "sighing and sobbing." In the lower portion, Cock Robin's funeral procession bears his open coffin to a row of bird graves, and some of Potter's birds are complete with tiny glass tears.³⁵ In "The Death and Burial of Cock Robin," Potter's birds literally enact and evoke death and preservation, and importantly, song. Creaney notes the "darkly ironic" nature of Potter's tableau, which he argues is "at once a work of formal innovation (using animals as signifiers of something other than themselves) and an intensely literal-minded one (replacing words and images with their real-world referents," and that anthropomorphic tableaux such as Potter's "collapse the distance between the corporeal and the figurative."³⁶

Potter's anthropomorphic tableau brings to light this chapter's issues of focus: first, that we need to understand bird taxidermy specifically with respect to the poetic trope(s) that subtend the Victorians' particular fascination with "stuffed birds." Second, that taxidermy makes the previously "unseen" poetic songbird visible. Third, that bird taxidermy literalizes the trope of the songbird, potentially enacting a literalization of poetic song. Through this exhibition of a preserved poetic figure, works like "The Original Death and Burial of Cock Robin," create a new figure in its place. Potter's tableau literalizes the song of Cock Robin, as Hardy's "In a Museum" literalizes the poetic songbird, and in so doing, creates yet another figure on display: a monument to the death of birdsong. Potter's case preserves Cock Robin and his mourners (and the killer Sparrow), acting both as memorial and reliquary for the Cock Robin character, and for the dozens of real birds populating the tableau.³⁷ It is important here to consider Potter's tableau

³⁵ Morris, *Curious World*: 47.

³⁶ See Creaney, 30, 7. And Creaney argues that the birds are "trapped within a work that denies natural temporality at the same time that it advocates the temporal work of mourning": 27. See also Verity Darke. "Reading the Body Object: Nineteenth-Century Taxidermy Manuals and *Our Mutual Friend*. 19: *Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*. 24 Open Library of Humanities (2017).

³⁷ See Creaney, 30.

alongside the poem and ballad of Cock Robin. While Creaney sees “The Original Death and Burial of Cock Robin” as a “naïve” literalization of the Cock Robin ballad,³⁸ I read the tableau as participating in the larger context this dissertation illuminates, that is, with respect to the poetic and acousmatic resonances of the songbird trope. The ballad takes the death of birdsong itself as its subject, and replaces that birdsong with an instrument (the bell). The tableau takes a ballad about the death of birdsong as *its* subject, literalizing the death of birdsong, and at the same time constructing a monument to it, replacing actual birdsong with a preserved, human-made reliquary.

Poor John Keats

Karen Swann argues that “the strange effects of posthumousness have continued to inflect our readings of romanticism into the present.”³⁹ Potter’s tableau would not be the first time that “Who Killed Cock Robin,” the ballad, became associated with the death and preservation of the poetic songbird. The rhyme was well-known verse in the earlier years of the nineteenth-century, and, after hearing of Keats’s death, Byron wrote a mock “Who Killed Cock Robin” verse entitled “Who Killed John Keats,” in an 1821 letter to John Murray:⁴⁰

Who killed John Keats?

I, says the Quarterly

So savage & Tartarly,

‘Twas one of my feats—

Who shot the arrow?

The poet-priest Milman

³⁸ Creaney, 30.

³⁹ See Karen Swann. “The Strange Time of Reading.” *European Romantic Review*. 9.2 (1998): 277.

⁴⁰ Opie, 132.

(So ready to kill man)

Or Southey, or Barrow.--⁴¹

Byron's mocking verse refers to Shelley's "Adonais," and Shelley's suggestion therein that *The Quarterly Review*'s scathing review of *Endymion*⁴² pushed an already frail Keats over the edge to his death. The commonplace nature of "Who Killed Cock Robin" made it a template readily available for parody, and, importantly, Byron's replacement of poor "Cock Robin" with poor "John Keats" in a known and oft-repeated or sung ballad is prescient about the ways Keats would be defined by his early death. Keats's death, as Swann argues, became literalized and memorialized in his life and death masks.⁴³

As I discuss above, Hardy looks back on the culture that created these literalizations in "In a Museum"; relics can never be experienced "in real time." Keats's masks, Swann suggests, "[present] the Poet as allegorical figure, a relic of a prematurely abbreviated life that survives into the present in denatured form, evoking a loss that can feel constitutive to Romanticism itself, be can also feel like *our* loss."⁴⁴ If we replace "Poet" with "songbird," this quotation could speak to Potter's "The Original Death and Burial of Cock Robin," in which the animals truly are "denatured." Like the taxidermied bird, Keats' relics both preserved the literal image of a living being after death, and additionally created a new figure altogether. Keats's masks are metonymic not only for "Keats" but for "Poet"; the taxidermied bird is metonymic for not only an actual, living bird, but for poetic birdsong. Swann further argues that Keats had a sense of himself as a

⁴¹ See Leslie A. Marchand, ed. *"Born for Opposition": Byron's Letters and Journals*, Vol. 8: 1821 (London: John Murray, 1978): 161-63. See also publicdomainreview.org/collections/the-death-and-burial-of-cock-robin/.

⁴² See Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat. *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co. 2002: 408-410. Shelley thought Southey wrote the review.

⁴³ Karen Swann. "Keats's Mask." *Minimal Romanticism. Romantic Circles*: 1 <https://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/brevity/praxis.2016.brevity.swann.html>. See also "The Strange Time of Reading." *European Romantic Review*. 9.2 (1998): 275-281.

⁴⁴ Karen Swann. "Keats's Mask." *Minimal Romanticism*. May 2016. *Romantic Circles*: 1 <https://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/brevity/praxis.2016.brevity.swann.html>. 23 March 2018.

relic of a lost context, improbably lasting into this brief afterlife—the lone survivor of a vanished and mourned world, the traces of which, obtruding by chance into *his* world, activate scenes and sense information lodged in memory, ruptured from any trajectory of hope or desire.⁴⁵

These pieces of Keatsiana, like Potter's tableau, became relics of the Keats mythos, Keats as “murdered” not by Sparrow, but by the *Quarterly Review*.

Keats, or the relics of “Keats” therefore needed to be restored (or, created) via reverie. Shelley provided one attempt, writing:

He is made one with Nature: there is heard
His voice in all her music, from the moan
Of thunder, to the song of night's sweet bird⁴⁶

In “Adonais,” Keats was already undergoing the transformation into and identification with, in part, his perhaps most lasting adaptation: the nightingale (and Byron takes up Keats-as-bird in his “Cock Robin” parody). Furthermore, Keats' nightingale prefigures the intertwining of life and death with respect to the songbird that we see in Victorian taxidermy (and, in perceptions of Keats after his death). In “Ode to a Nightingale,” Keats's “embalmed darkness” reminds us of his nightingale's lifelessness, or even its non-existence. Does poetry itself “embalm” darkness, and preserve the nightingale? Like a taxidermied songbird, the trope of the songbird exists, preserved, in the poetry.

Previously, I discussed a review by Francis Jeffrey that expresses a connection between music and “immortality”; Jeffrey posits music as a preserving or embalming medium in which poetry may be preserved forever.⁴⁷ Keats' lines from “Ode to a Nightingale,”

⁴⁵ See Swann. “Keats's Mask.” *Minimal Romanticism*. May 2016. *Romantic Circles*: 6
<https://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/brevity/praxis.2016.brevity.swann.html>. 23 March 2018.

⁴⁶ See Percy Bysshe Shelley. “Adonais.” *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2002: 423.

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!

No hungry generations tread thee down;

The voice I hear this passing night was heard

In ancient days by emperor and clown,

are resonant not only with Shelley's characterization of Keats in "Adonais," but are recalled in Hardy's "In a Museum," with which this chapter opened ("Such a dream is Time that the coo of this ancient bird/ Has perished not, but is blent, or will be blending/ Mid visionless wilds of space with the voice that I heard").

The voice that Shelley hears, in "Adonais," is his perceived legacy of Keats, the poetic transmogrification of Keats into Nature's music; Shelley's poem attempts to enact this transmogrification via preservation of Keats in verse. The voice that Hardy hears, in "In a Museum," is the voice of the past, or, many pasts, at a remove. The voice that Keats hears, in "Ode to a Nightingale," ("This voice I hear") can certainly be interpreted as Keats "hearing" the poetic calling or the poetic lyre.⁴⁷ However, if, as I argue in this chapter, we can read bird taxidermy as a literalization of the poetic trope of the songbird, perhaps taxidermy and the ways it intertwines sound and silence, life and death, can provide different ways to think about Keats's poem. Helen Vendler notes that "the interesting thing about the song of Keats' nightingale is that

⁴⁷ Jeffrey writes, "Even the splendid strains of Moore are fading into distance and dimness, except where they have been married to immortal music." Jeffrey's intriguing sentiment is unfortunately couched in a favorable, though condescending review of Hemans as a female author. Francis Jeffrey. "[Review of the second editions of *Records of Women* (1828) and *The Forest Sanctuary* (1829)]." *Edinburgh Review* 50 (1829)" in Felicia Hemans, and Susan J. Wolfson. *Felicia Hemans: Selected Poems, Letters, Reception Materials*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000: 554.

⁴⁸ Andrew Kappel recounts Charles Brown's (potentially apocryphal) tale of Keats's moments of inspiration and composition—that of hearing an actual nightingale: "there was a nightingale singing while Keats wrote. In fact, according to Brown, Keats had heard the song of the nightingale many times before the morning of composition; on that particular day, says Brown, Keats moved his chair 'from the breakfast table to the grass-plot under a plum-tree.' To begin with, then, Keats' nightingale is an actual bird in an actual tree, a comfortable inhabitant of the natural world whose song, heard through the poet's sensual ear, has drawn him from the human ceremony of breakfast to infiltrate the natural occasion involving grass-plot, plum-tree and singing bird." Andrew J. Kappel. "The Immortality of the Natural: Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale.'" *ELH*, vol. 45, no. 2, 1978, pp. 270–284.

it is vocal without verbal content, a pure vocalise,”⁴⁹ Yet, the poem’s *performance* of a pure vocalise is actually the most interesting thing about Keats’ nightingale.⁵⁰ The poem presents the same staging of the acousmatic that I discuss in chapter one with respect to Aeolian harp poetry, that is, that the poems perform the obscuring of the sound’s source, and that performance is made visible by the mode of apostrophe: because the poems apostrophize the harp, we already know the music’s source from the poems’ openings, and usually, titles.

Vendler further argues that “[t]he listener in darkness, offered pure natural music without human ideational content, fills both bower and song with fancies of his own”⁵¹—this “pure natural music” is what Aeolian harp poetry and “Ode to a Nightingale” feign. Vendler sees the nightingale’s song in Keats as a cypher. Poliquin claims that taxidermy performs something similar, arguing that “animals have no innate meaning: meaning is always a human intellectual imposition.” The performance of “nature’s music” in the poetry aligns here with the feigned naturalness of bird taxidermy. While “Ode to a Nightingale” attempts to erase the “human intellectual imposition,” like the Aeolian harp poems that try to obscure the music’s source, that source still is observable. The mechanism of obscuring the source is visible via the mode of apostrophe; that is, apostrophe locates the source of the music by addressing it, the rest of the poem works to dislocate that source.

“Ode to a Nightingale,” therefore, performs the trope of “nature’s music.” Moreover, if we think about the poem with respect to the taxidermied bird, and to Keats’s masks—that is, along the lines of death and preservation—it is noteworthy that Keats’s Ode also mourns the loss of birdsong. In the final stanza, the nightingale’s song becomes diffuse, its origin less and less discernable with each line:

⁴⁹ Helen Vendler. *The Odes of John Keats*. Cambridge: Belnap Press of Harvard University Press, 1983: 78.

⁵⁰ Poliquin, 39.

⁵¹ Vendler, 86.

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
 To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
 Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
 As she is fam'd to do, deceiving elf.
 Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
 Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
 Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
 In the next valley-glades:
 Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
 Fled is that music: --Do I wake or sleep?⁵²

Here, Keats's simile of the tolling bell "sounds" and reverberates in the fading birdsong, as a bell's ring decays, the sound fading with time. Returning briefly to "Who Killed Cock Robin": the ballad's final stanza has all the birds "sighing and sobbing" at the tolling of a bell for Cock Robin's death, effectively replacing birdsong (Cock Robin's) with the sound of the bell. In Keats, the simile of the bell briefly becomes interchangeable with the metaphor of the poetic songbird as the bell's "sound" rings in the stanza's first line, and then decays as the birdsong fades, sinking into the meadows and glades.

If, for Francis Jeffrey, music preserves poetry; for Keats, poetry itself is the preservative. Both "Ode to a Nightingale" and Potter's tableau preserve and enact the loss of poetic birdsong, all the while evoking acousmatic sound. Bird taxidermy preserves and literalizes the "immortality" of the poetic songbird, all the while creating a new figure, what Swann calls a "denatured form" that "evokes loss".⁵³ Yet, while the "song" of a living bird is lost in the process of death and preservation, the "reverie" remains.

⁵² John Keats. "Ode to a Nightingale." *Keats's Poetry and Prose*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2009: 460.

Dead Metaphors

While we know anthropomorphic taxidermy like Walter Potter's was popular, novelty taxidermy was just that: a novelty. More common in everyday and domestic spaces were non-anthropomorphized preserved animals. Poliquin points out that "[m]ost of Potter's taxidermy conforms to the quintessential Victorian aesthetic of bottling birds under glass domes with a few sprigs of foliage for ambience."⁵⁴ Indeed, Potter's anthropomorphic tableaux make up only a fraction of his work. These kinds of non-anthropomorphic taxidermied specimens that comprised the bulk of Potter's work, for example, were seen as desirable objects for the home, a trend that Pat Morris notes "peaked in the late 1800s."⁵⁵ Amateur taxidermy was even taken up as a home hobby, and Beth Fowkes Tobin notes that domestic works such as *Godey's Lady's Book* and the eighteenth-century *The Young Ladies School of Arts* provided information and instructions on home taxidermy; *Godey's* instructed women on how to preserve their pet birds after death: the sentimental preservation of poetic birdsong as home craft project. Tobin reminds us that taxidermy was indeed one of the "ordinary and domestic feminine arts."⁵⁶ Birds were the most popular animals for both domestic display and for home taxidermy endeavors. Sarah Bowditch Lee, in her *Taxidermy: Or, The Art of Collecting, Preparing, And Mounting Objects of Natural History. For the Use of Museums and Travellers* (1820),⁵⁷ suggests that birds inspired the art of

⁵³ Karen Swann. "Keats's Mask." *Minimal Romanticism. Romantic Circles*: 1
<https://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/brevity/praxis.2016.brevity.swann.html>

⁵⁴ Poliquin, 182.

⁵⁵ Pat Morris. *A History of Taxidermy: Art, Science, and Bad Taste*. Ascot: MPM Publishing, 2010: 3. In addition, Elizabeth Burton writes, "In addition to bouquets and floral prints, other bits of nature were enshrined indoors and displayed as part of the bric-a-brac of cluttered Victorian homes. The more 'knick-knacks' a room contained, the better. Along with china, paperweights, sand wax fruit, 'stuffed birds, reptiles, small animals,... flowers under glass domes' were very much in vogue in home décor." Quoted in Lynn L. Merrill *The Romance of Victorian Natural History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989: 31.

⁵⁶ Beth Fowkes Tobin. "Women, Decorative Arts, and Taxidermy." *Women and the Material Culture of Death*. ed. Goggin, Maureen Daly. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016: 315; 311; 312.

⁵⁷ Tobin notes that the term "taxidermy" appears for the first time in Lee's book. Beth Fowkes Tobin. "Women, Decorative Arts, and Taxidermy." *Women and the Material Culture of Death*. Ed. Goggin, Maureen Daly. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016: 315. See also Lee, R.. *Taxidermy: Or, The Art of Collecting, Preparing,*

taxidermy itself, writing:

Birds have had the preference over all other animals from the richness of their plumage, and the elegance of their forms. The desire of preserving their beautiful skin has given birth to Taxidermy; at least if we may judge by the preference naturally accorded to them by all those who have imbibed a taste for this art.”⁵⁸

While museums and exhibitions were certainly a place where one could view preserved animals, taxidermied birds were very much a part of Victorian everyday life, as natural history collections and cabinets were an occupation that spanned income and class divides.⁵⁹ An illustrated review in *The Lady's Newspaper* of furniture featured at the 1851 Exhibition discusses a (non-anthropomorphic) group of taxidermied birds on display, giving us an idea of how non-anthropomorphic “stuffed birds” were viewed; the reviewer writes, “Another illustration ... is a group of stuffed birds by Hancock, which, though scarcely an article of furniture, may legitimately be classed with it, as these things are often introduced to ornament a room” [Figure 4.2].⁶⁰ This review draws attention to the commonplace nature of “stuffed birds”—they are another piece of décor [Figure 4.2]. Several entries in the Old Bailey crime notices list “stuffed birds” (often along with their cases) as items stolen during home robberies.⁶¹

And Mounting Objects of Natural History. For the Use of Museums And Travellers. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1820.

⁵⁸ R. Lee. *Taxidermy: Or, The Art of Collecting, Preparing, And Mounting Objects of Natural History. For the Use of Museums And Travellers.* London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1820: 9.

⁵⁹ See Lynn L. Merrill. *The Romance of Victorian Natural History.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1989:108.

⁶⁰ “Articles to be Seen at the Great Exhibition.” *The Lady's Newspaper* (London, England), Saturday, September 13, 1851; pg. 140; Issue 246. 1-2

⁶¹ See, for example, “ROBERT ROBERTS, Theft : simple larceny, 15th January 1829”; “JONAS KAY, Theft : simple larceny, 15th May 1834”; “ELIZABETH ANN HUBBERT, ELIZABETH HUBBERT, Theft : simple larceny, 12th June 1843”; “THOMAS KING, JOHN CUMMINS, Theft : housebreaking, 3rd March 1845.” *Proceedings of the Old Bailey.* 2005-2015 ProQuest.



Figure 4.2: "Stuffed Birds" from "Articles to be seen at the Great Exhibition" (1851).⁶²

American hymnist Harriet McEwan Kimball's 1880 poem, "The Stuffed Bird," explores the lives, or afterlives, of taxidermied birds as common domestic objects.⁶³ The title, which refers to the bird as "stuffed" already indicates its narrator's sentiments towards the taxidermied specimen: while "stuffed" was common parlance for taxidermied animals (as used in the *Lady's Newspaper* review discussed above), it often connoted a disdain for amateur taxidermy.

⁶² The tableau by acclaimed taxidermist John Hancock shows a fighting falcon and heron. See Morris, *A History of Taxidermy*, 54-55.

⁶³ Harriet McEwan Kimball. *Poems*. Complete ed. New York: A.D.F. Randolph, 1889: 290-291 The poem first appeared in *The Youth's Companion* in 1880. *The Youth's Companion*..53.36 (Sept1880): 298.

As in “In a Museum,” Kimball’s narrator considers a preserved bird. Yet, rather than meditating on sound, time and space, or the nature of human perception, “The Stuffed Bird” focuses on the fact that the preserved bird cannot sing or fly. However, the poem’s lament is still inspired by the association of birdsong with the taxidermied bird (that we see in Hardy) and mentions that the narrator would trade the stuffed bird’s “tropical beauty” for an ability to sing.

This tropical beauty I’d willingly lose
If suddenly, swiftly, one rapturous thrill
This bright little throat with a song-burst would
Fill

The tropical plumage of the taxidermied bird is contrasted in the final stanza with a “little brown bird”.

Ah, what a contrast!—look, dearie, and see
That little brown bird in the evergreen tree,
With no beauty to boast of, and one little note
Like a musical throb in its live little throat!

There is a proposed trade of beauty and the attention and visibility that accompanies it for the less visible songbird. The poem asks us to consider both birds, dead and (imaginary) living. While the “stuffed” bird only evokes the memory or imagination or desire for song, the imagined live bird provides the song without the beauty or tropical feathers. In Hardy’s “In a Museum,” there is a movement from visible to invisible; in Kimball, the visible beauty moves towards plainness, which the narrator invites us to “see.” The taxidermied, tropical bird in Kimball’s poem serves as a reminder of the songbird—and importantly, the songbird trope—by highlighting its absence. Kimball’s “little brown bird” with “no beauty to boast of” aligns with

aspects of the poetic nightingale. And the poem certainly reflects well-known anxieties about the loss of “poetry” in a world of science, specimens, and perhaps the cluttered décor of a Victorian parlor. I suggest that Kimball’s poem—which appeared in the periodicals--wants to return to the acousmatic, unseen sounds of the poetic songbird cliché. The narrator wants a real live singing bird, not a specimen; the poem itself expresses the absence of the poetic songbird trope: this poem’s narrator cannot in fact call upon the nightingale, for example, and employ its song as a sentimental, sound-based melancholy mood reference. Like Hardy’s narrator in “The Darkling Thrush,” Kimball’s narrator is cut off from the poetic songbird, this time, by the very object expected to evoke it (a stuffed bird).

The narrator regards the “stuffed bird” at a remove: it is “denatured,” and, after Stewart, “manipulated into a human time and order.”⁶⁴ The consideration of a domestic taxidermied bird that we see in Kimball is the figure that Hardy reflects on in “In a Museum.” What Hardy’s narrator regards is not a preserved bird at one remove, a metonym of the poetic songbird “manipulated into a human time,” but a museum specimen of that metonym, at yet another remove. Kimball’s poem documents the narrators inability to restore the “stuffed bird” with an appropriate reverie, the narrator can only contrast what a live bird *might* do.

Plea of the Songbirds

“A stuffed bird is, after all, a poor caricature of the living animal. What is best worth study in any class of animals is surely that which is most characteristic of that class—in birds, undoubtedly, the gift of song, the gift of flight, and their beautiful care for their

⁶⁴ Stewart, 151.

young. Yet we silence the song of a bird that we may acquire the skin from which it issued.”⁶⁵

So writes Wardlaw Kennedy in *Beasts. Thumb-Nail Studies in Pets* (1899). Kennedy’s statement is one of many in the rising sentiments against taxidermy in the late nineteenth-century. These sentiments largely concern taxidermied birds specifically, which were often worn as part of women’s fashion. Just as *Godey’s Ladies’ Book* instructed women how to preserve their pet birds, taxidermy in fashion also drew on a sentimental relation to animals.⁶⁶ Julia Long argues that fashionable taxidermy became somewhat of a battleground. Those against the wearing of “smashed birds”⁶⁷ as one angry columnist names them perhaps began to see taxidermy, in this case, as no longer “preserving” at all, but actually destroying species. Again the association of taxidermy with the songbird cliché comes into play: an 1891 piece in the *Ladies Home Journal* entitled “Plea of the Songbirds”⁶⁸ is written in the form of a petition against slaughtering songbirds for fashion and their feathers. The petition, supposedly signed by Brown Thrasher, Hermit Thrush, Vesper Sparrow, Song Sparrow, and a variety of American songbirds, laments that “Even the nightingales are being killed in Italy,” as though the killing of nightingales may be one of the worst crimes. The petitioning songbirds state, “Now, we have a sad story to tell you”; as the article is written in the birds’ voices, this somewhat mimics the standard melancholy message of the nightingale. Another sentence ends with a repeated “We know. We know,” mimicking a repetitive birdcall. The “petition” draws on the sentimental associations of the songbird to argue against killing them for fashionable taxidermy, promising at the end, “[s]oon all the birds will come to live in Massachusetts again, and everybody who loves music will like a

⁶⁵ Wardlaw Kennedy. *Beasts; Thumb-nail Studies in Pets*. London: Macmillan and co., limited, 1899: 142-143.

⁶⁶ See Julie Long. “Portable Pets: Live and Apparently Live Animals in Fashion, 1880-1925.” *Costume*, Vol. 3 (2009): 109-126.

⁶⁷ “Wearing Smashed Birds.” *New York Times*, June 5, 1887: 13.

⁶⁸ “Plea of the Songbirds” *Ladies Home Journal* 1891.

summer home with you.” Like Kimball’s poem (which can also be read in context with this turn against taxidermy), “Plea of the Songbirds” mobilizes the songbird trope and its associations with music, which were already connected with so-called “stuffed birds” against bird taxidermy, notably, using the imagined voices of the birds themselves.

...sing to you, and even whippoorwill will cheer
 you up. We know where we are safe. Soon all the
 birds will come to live in Massachusetts again, and every-
 body who loves music will like a summer home with you.”

BROWN THRASHER,	KINGBIRD,	ROBERT O’LINCOLN,
HERMIT THRUSH,	SWALLOW,	CEDARBIRD,
VESPER SPARROW,	COWBIRD,	ROBIN REDBREAST,
SONG SPARROW,	MARTIN,	VEERY,
SCARLET TANAGER,	VIREO,	SUMMER REDBIRD,
BLUE HERON,	ORIOLE,	BLACKBIRD,
HUMMINGBIRD,	PIFEBIRD,	YELLOWBIRD,
WHIPPOORWILL,	WREN,	LINNET,
WATER WAGTAIL,	PEEWEE,	PHOEBE,
WOODPECKER,	LARK,	YOKEBIRD,
INDIGO BIRD,	SANDPIPER,	YELLOW THROAT,
WILSON’S THRUSH,	CHEWINK,	CHICKADEE,
	PIGEON WOODPECKER.	

Figure 4.3: Avian petition signers from “Plea of the Songbirds” (1891).

Therefore, a movement to end the killing of songbirds (especially in the later nineteenth century) existed alongside the Victorian fascination with taxidermy, and the motivation behind the sympathy for songbirds was largely aesthetic. Eliza Lutley Boucher, writing in the March, 1891 issue of *Woman’s Herald*, argues “[t]hese birds have become a part of the national life, and over and over again have been worthily commemorated in the literature and poetry of the land.”⁶⁹ Here, the aesthetic valuation of sound as worthwhile in itself is linked to aesthetic sensitivity cultivated through poetry. Romanticism’s privileging of sound through its major tropes of the harp and songbird set up this relation to preserved birds in the later years of the nineteenth

⁶⁹ Eliza Lutley Boucher. “Shall We Eat Our Songsters?.” *Woman’s Herald* (London, England), Saturday, March 21, 1891; pg. 343; Issue 126.

century. The desire to preserve birds after death, and the desire for the preservation of birds' lives—and bird species—are both motivated here by the same aesthetic relation to the bird via the poetic trope of the songbird.

Victorian bird taxidermy was therefore fraught: on one hand, taxidermy was desired as home decor, as fashion accessories, a novelty at exhibitions, and displayed at museums. On the other hand, birdsong often provided taxidermy detractors with fuel for their arguments: who could oppose the nightingale's song? In other words, while birds were valued for their colorful feathers, it was often the birds' musical abilities that came into play for those arguing against stuffed birds for decor and for fashion. Silent, stuffed birds both evoked the memory of song, and, like Hardy's and Kimball's poems, and Potter's tableau discussed above, underscored its absence. Taxidermy in fashion was at once a sentimental reminder of poetic birdsong, and a wearable elegy for that imagined music.

“Once Out of Nature”

*Play me my song
Here it comes again
Play me my song
Here it comes again*

—Genesis, “*The Musical Box*”⁷⁰

Bird taxidermy suspends animals in time, allowing those who regard it to supply their own imaginative pleasure, or, reverie. The mechanical bird, however, provides the sound of feigned birdsong. Like the other objects in this dissertation, the mechanical bird is at once a rather commonplace household object (yet, likely to be significantly more costly than an Aeolian harp or small stuffed bird), and, at the same time, an unearthly poetic figure. Singing bird boxes

⁷⁰ Genesis. “The Musical Box.” *Nursury Cryme*. Charisma Records 1971.

were in production from the eighteenth century⁷¹, yet I will discuss one example of a singing bird box from the late nineteenth century, likely made by French singing bird box manufacturer Bontems.⁷² This bird automaton would have been enclosed in a delicate cage; here, however, its musical mechanism is exposed [Figure 4.4].

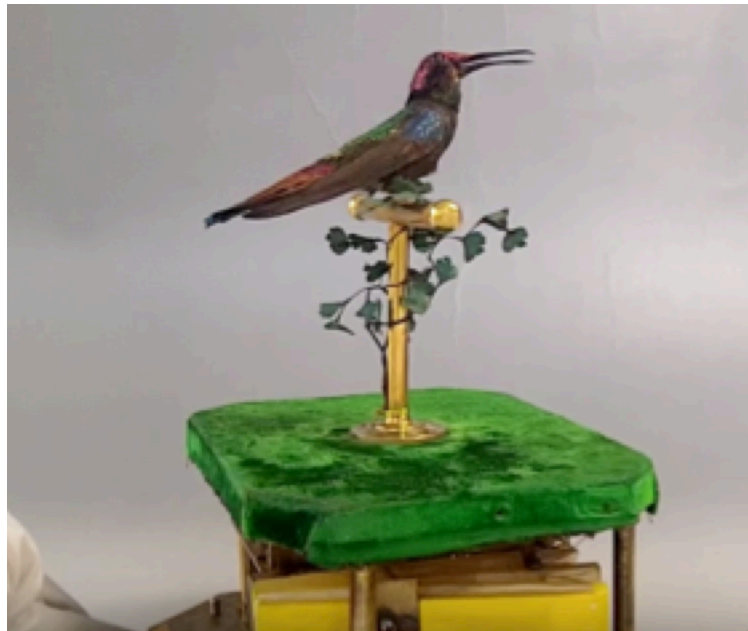


Figure 4.4: Screen capture of video showing singing hummingbird music box, made by Bontems.

This image shows a music box that produces a mechanical bird song, and that features a bird automaton covered with real bird feathers. The bird automaton here is made to resemble a hummingbird (or, to resemble a taxidermied hummingbird)—a bird known for its coloring and beauty, but not particularly for its song.⁷³ This bird perches sits on a gold perch wound with small leaves, and the bottom of what would be the cage is covered with green material imitating

⁷¹ See Geoffrey T. Mayson. *Singing Bird Tabatières*. London: Robert Hale, 2000: 7.

⁷² See Singing Bird Cage Music Box. “The Finest Bird Song of 1890 - Amazing Condition With Real Hummingbird Feathers” *YouTube*, August 8, 2016. youtu.be/4y-njbaCjug

⁷³ Judith Pascoe notes that William Bullock, London Museum curator and hummingbird collector, write, after finally seeing a live hummingbird in 1823: “I often approached within a few feet, with pleasure observing his tiny operation of dressing and pluming, and listening to his weak, simple, and often-repeated note.” Pascoe, Judith. “The Hummingbird Cabinet.” *The Wordsworth Circle*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2004: 32.

grass. The perch with its false leaves, and the bright green ground underscore the unnaturalness of the bird automaton, despite its real feathers and lifelike beak. The feathers' source, the hummingbird, is not only taken out of its original context, but is almost completely removed, leaving only its feathers as a coating for an automated bird, in a false natural surrounding. This chimerical automaton, therefore, seems an attempt to capture best of both worlds: a colorful bird combined with the singing abilities of songbirds, which were known as "plain" (Kimball's poem, for example, praises the beautiful coloration of the preserved bird, yet ultimately prefers the brown bird for its song and vitality). The unavailability or rarity of the visually pleasing bird replaces the invisibility of the musical bird. It is no surprise, therefore, that this particular automaton pairs a bird renowned for its colorful and elusive beauty with the mimicry of a songbird's call.

The Victorians were obsessed with hummingbirds, and, because the birds were native to the Americas and couldn't survive a transatlantic voyage, "for Victorian audiences, seeing a hummingbird necessarily meant seeing a taxidermied rendition of the bird."⁷⁴ In addition, "[m]ore than seventy-five thousand people visited [John] Gould's hummingbird pavilion" at the 1851 Great Exhibition. Gould's pavilion at the exhibition was so popular, it was reopened in Regent's Park the following year.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Poliquin, 46..

⁷⁵ Poliquin, 48. See also "Mr. Gould's Collection of Humming-Birds in the Zoological Gardens, Regent's Park." *Illustrated London News* [London, England] 12 June 1852: 457+. *Illustrated London News*. Web. 11 Mar. 2018.



Figure 4.5: Gould's hummingbird pavillion, after it was re-opened in Regent's Park in 1852.⁷⁶

An article in *Scientific American* discusses the new types of bird automata available in the late nineteenth century: “At first sight, the bird is absolutely like the natural one, whose plumage it borrows, whether it represents a simple nightingale or is adorned with the brilliant feathers of a bird of paradise. Neither in the pose nor the form could the art of the taxidermist do better.”⁷⁷ As Poliquin reminds us, “Taxidermy distill[s] a bird’s aesthetic charms. If the sheen and shimmer of specimens faded with death, the birds were nevertheless caught up in an aesthetic culture of romanticized nature that could only see them as beautiful.”⁷⁸ In taxidermy-like automata, the mechanical bird is covered with real bird feathers, the object is a music box that generates song,

⁷⁶ “This celebrated collection, which added so extensively to the attractions presented by the Zoological society to their myriad visitors during last summer, has been recently re-opened on a new site, with the manifest improvement of no extra charge being made to the public for admission to it.” See “Mr. Gould's Collection of Humming-Birds in the Zoological Gardens, Regent's Park.” *Illustrated London News* [London, England] 12 June 1852: 457+. *Illustrated London News*. Web. 11 Mar. 2018.

⁷⁷ “Mechanical Singing Birds” *Scientific American*, vol.67, No 5 (July 30, 1892): 70.

⁷⁸ Poliquin, 48.

replacing the imagined, poetic song of the songbird with a repetitive, mechanical music-box tune. Automata music boxes, like the one discussed here, seem an attempt at to fulfill both the aesthetic desire for taxidermied birds *and* a literalization of their poetic valances. The wish for song that Kimball's poem expresses, and the memory that appears in Hardy express a link between desire for, or memory of, music and the taxidermied bird-object. That is, the bird automaton literalizes the connection between the poetic songbird and the taxidermied bird, producing an animated, and automated, relic.

I close with this singing hummingbird automaton because it, like Hardy's bird, or Potter's tableau, in attempting to preserve and literalize a poetic figure, ultimately creates still a different figure on display: here, that of a mechanical singing bird that both fulfills the desire for a hummingbird's beauty and the desire for, or memory of, music with respect to taxidermied birds, by literally playing an approximation of birdsong. Previously, I have discussed this dissertation's poetic tropes with respect to the repetitive nature of much Aeolian harp poetry and of cliché itself. I have also suggested that we consider this kind of repetition alongside the methods of producing repetition employed by *musique concrète* composers, that is, the lock groove, for example. The musical bird box performs this kind of repetition, playing the automated birdsong over and over again; in this way, a singing bird box differs from the Aeolian harp and the living songbird in that it needs to be wound and re-wound, and produces a repetitive (though, in the case of the example above, almost lifelike) sound. This hummingbird automaton attempts, like taxidermy, to create the sense of life in a dead (or inanimate) object. The hummingbird is not only "denatured," only part of it remains (the feathers), recalling Yeats:

Once out of nature I shall never take

My bodily form from any natural thing,

But such a form as Grecian goldsmiths make
Of hammered gold and gold enameling
To keep a drowsy Emperor awake;
Or set upon a golden bough to sing
To lords and ladies of Byzantium
Of what is past, or passing, or to come.⁷⁹

If Keats transmogrifies into the nightingale in “Adonais,” Yeats’s narrator in “Sailing to Byzantium,” posits becoming a mechanical bird, set to play at the will of others as a costly golden toy. Daniel Tiffany claims that Yeats’s bird, “an automaton, revises the Romantic topos of the bird, which functions in the poetry of Keats, Coleridge, and Shelley as an emblem of lyric poetry” and that “Yeats’ automaton represents a body ‘out of nature’ inhabited by the poet, but also a body that is distinguished, in the end, by its immateriality.”⁸⁰ Yeats’s poet-bird is “out of nature”-- denatured--removed from its context like Stewart’s souvenir, or rather: Yeats’s poem details the process of becoming the preserved object and souvenir. Indeed, Yeats’s narrator (an “aged man”) characterizes himself as a “dying animal.”⁸¹ Here, the poet-bird details its own death and (potential, imaginary) preservation. Unlike in most of the poetry discussed in this chapter, Yeats’s narrator doesn’t “hear,” or imagine hearing, a voice, and his bird doesn’t sing: the poem only posits what the bird-poet might do.

Yeats’s bird, like Hardy’s “mould of a musical bird,” seems to exist within, or have knowledge of, synchronous time, the deep past, present, and future. A real mechanical bird’s song, by contrast, exists within the set time constraints of its mechanisms, and repeats its worn

⁷⁹ William Butler Yeats. “Sailing to Byzantium.” *Yeats’s Poetry, Drama, and Prose*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000: 81.

⁸⁰ See Daniel Tiffany. *Toy Medium: Modernism and Modern Lyric*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000:18.

⁸¹ Yeats, 80.

tune again and again. Vendler argues that Yeats imbues his mechanical bird with knowledge, “tales and histories and philosophical prophecies to utter.”⁸² However, I agree with Caroline Blyth that Hardy’s thrush is the “fleshly precursor to Yeats’s ‘golden bird.’”⁸³ In Yeats’s poem, the “drowsy emperor” and the “lords and ladies” only hear the repetitive tune of a mechanical bird, not the knowledge that the poet “out of nature” can allude to in the poem itself, just as Hardy’s narrator can only see an aged bird, and hear its joyful song, not feel the emotional knowledge and connection he expects the bird to provoke.

The repetition of a mechanical bird prefigures the kinds of *musique concrète* experiments with repetition this dissertation has previously discussed. While the bird automaton’s sound only mimics that of real birdsong, it, like the worn songbird cliché repeats itself, creating a wash of sound and meaning, dislocating the source of the music. Perhaps the Aeolian harp and the poetic songbird are so resonant because they speak to the paradox of poetry, which, after Tiffany, exists as poetic “substance” that can still “sing,” that poetry is in a sense the harp and bird⁸⁴, not merely represented by them. In this way, the idea of the acousmatic is potentially integrally related to the idea of poetry as song. Shelley’s use of both the Aeolian harp and the nightingale in “A Defence of Poetry” mark them as “vitally metaphorical,” even as they became ossified, or, taxidermied, versions of themselves. The preserved birds discussed in this chapter become relics of the poetic songbird—they both preserve a worn trope and create a new, elegiac figure in its place.

⁸² Helen Vendler. *The Odes of John Keats*. Cambridge: Belnap Press of Harvard University Press, 1983: 80.

⁸³ See Caroline Blyth. “Language and Subjectivity: The Darkling Thrush and the Golden Bird.” *Critical Quarterly*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (2003): 76-83: 77. Blyth, however, claims that Hardy’s narrator never sees the thrush, yet, as I demonstrate above, the bird’s visibility is a crucial aspect of Hardy’s poem.

⁸⁴ Tiffany, 18.

Coda: Resonances

Automated sound, and concepts of the acousmatic, would resurface in the musics of the twentieth century, when the term itself came into use--and *Musique Concrète*'s usage of the term "acousmatic" might well have come from the poets. According to Brian Kane, poet and novelist Jérôme Peignot suggested the term to Pierre Schaeffer in 1960, yet, Peignot apparently borrowed the term from Guillaume Apollinaire, who authored two poems he titled "*Acousmate*."¹ Kane suggests that this is one explanation for the term's eventual uptake by composers such as Pierre Schaeffer and François Bayle, a suggestive lineage in the context of this project.

Bayle in particular adapted the acousmatic in striking and now definitive ways, creating the "Acousmonium" in 1974: "an orchestra of loudspeakers arranged in front of, around and within the concert audience"; the listeners are then "plunged into near-darkness, and the performer (usually in fact the composer) diffuses the work from the console placed in the centre of the audience."² A decade earlier, Bayle composed "L'Oiseau Chanteur"(1963). "The Songbird" or "The Singing Bird." This composition uses real instruments, extending their sounds though tape manipulation, resulting in "an extension of the characteristic instrumental timbres."³ In this way, Bayle's piece is an example of electro-acoustic music, that is, "music that is produced, changed, or reproduced by electronic means," and, further, an example of *musique*

¹ Kane suggests the terms "acousmate" and "acousmatic"(or, "*acousmatique*") became muddled around this time. "Acousmate" in the sense that Apollinaire used it, meant "imagined sound," and "hearing" the voices of angels. See Kane, 74-75.

² See "The Acousmonium. 12 August, 2010. inagrm.com/en/showcase/news/202/the-acousmonium. 26 March, 2018.

³ See Barry Schrader. *Introduction to Electro-Acoustic Music*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1982: 53.

concrète: “electro-acoustic music that uses acoustic sounds as source material.”⁴ Through the cutting and splicing of tape, sounds resembling birdsong emerge throughout the four-minute piece, along with sounds resembling laughter, mesh with sounds that remain true to the instruments Bayle uses (“French horn, oboe, and harpsichord.”)⁵ In Bayle’s piece the sounds of real instruments fluctuate between sounding like themselves, that is, sounding *like* a French horn, and sounding like something else, here, birds. Bayle’s composition, in this way, attempts to mimic the acousmatic sound of real birdsong, by manipulating human-played instruments.

This project has shown that evoking or mimicking the acousmatic was a feature of much popular poetry of the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; additionally, nineteenth century composers attempted, again and again, to capture the idea of the Aeolian harp’s sounds and poetic valences in musical settings. Two early examples here are Charles Didbin’s “Aeolian Harp”(1802)[Figure 5.1] (potentially the earliest Aeolian harp composition)⁶ and Leigh Hunt’s “Love and the Aeolian Harp,”(1814) set to music by composer John Whitaker. Hunt’s lyrics posit nature over art, and a “heavenly” or invisible hand that plays upon the harp, and praise the harp’s sounds at night, foregrounding the unseen:

Art cannot rule the wond’rous sound,
In cloud ‘tis dull, in storms ‘tis drown’d;
But sweet the hour, and long the sighs,
And long ‘twill answer ere it dies:
And heav’ns own hand shall seem to stray,

⁴ Schrader, 1-2.

⁵ Schrader, 53. See also François Bayle. “L’Oiseau Chanteur.” youtu.be/XgGPuu4-gA8.

⁶ Windisch-Laube, Walter. “A Magic Lantern of Sound? The Aeolian Harp Between Cheap Showmanship and Spiritual Mystery, here shown as a Catalyst within the History of Music.” *Magic, Science, Technology, and Literature*. Eds. Mildorf, Jarmila, Hans Ulrich Seeber, and Martin Windisch.(2006): 252.

O'er all its fibres of delight,
 Less play'd and heard by busy day,
 But oh, divine at night!⁷

In this way, Hunt's poem (and Didbin's) resemble so many of the Aeolian harp poems discussed in chapter one, yet they are given rather standard musical settings that do not attempt to imitate the harp's actual sounds. On the contrary, the first bars of William Sterndale Bennett's instrumental "Aeolus" (1878) portray the sweeping, random nature associated with the harp's sounds [Figure 5.2].



Figure 5.1: Didbin. "Aeolian Harp" (1802).⁸



⁷ John Whitaker and Leigh Hunt. "Love and the Aeolian Harp." London, 1814.

⁸ The embedded sound file can be accessed via Adobe reader, otherwise, for the sound clip please visit: <https://aeolianresonance.wordpress.com/2018/05/10/charles-didbin-aeolian-harp-1802/>

The Aeolian harp, though out of fashion for decades as a household accoutrement and poetic trope, would resurface in pianist and composer Henry Cowell's composition "Aeolian Harp"(1923). Designated for "stringpiano" (Cowell's method of reaching inside the piano and playing the strings like a harp), "Aeolian harp" contains randomly strummed chords, not quite mimicking the sound of an Aeolian harp, but, like Bennett's piece, presenting the *idea* of what an Aeolian harp should sound like [Figure 5.3]. Yet Cowell's piece differs from Bennett in that it marks a turning point in interpretations and understanding of the harp. Rather than a sentimental parlor tune praising the harp's sounds, or the sweeping ascending and descending runs we see in Bennett, Cowell's "Aeolian Harp" features strummed chords, not unlike guitar or harp (non-Aeolian) music.⁹

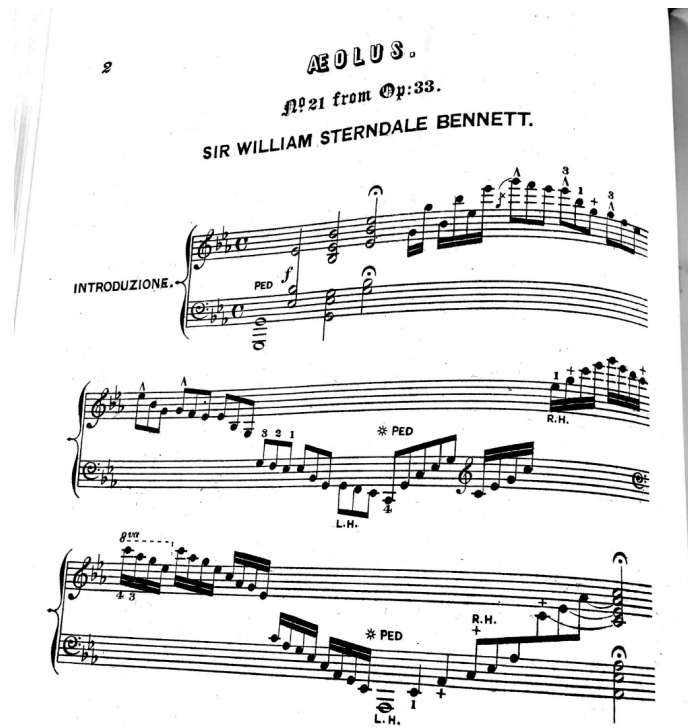


Figure 5.2: William Sterndale Bennett. "Aeolus." (1878).¹⁰



⁹ See Windisch-Laube, 258.

¹⁰ The embedded sound file can be accessed via Adobe reader, otherwise, for the sound clip please visit: <https://aeolianresonance.wordpress.com/2018/05/10/william-sterndale-bennett-aeolus-for-pianoforte-1878/>

4. Aeolian Harp

Explanation of Symbols

All of the notes of the "Aeolian Harp" should be pressed down on the keys, without sounding, at the same time being played on the open strings of the piano with the other hand.

sw. indicates that the strings should be swept from the lowest to the highest note of the chord given, or if the arpeggio mark is given with a downward arrow, from the top to the bottom note of the chord.

pizz. indicates the string is to be plucked. Both sweeps and plucks are made with the flesh of the finger unless otherwise indicated.

"inside" indicates that the notes are to be played near the center of the string, inside the steel bar which runs parallel to the keyboard across the strings.

"outside" indicates that the notes are to be played outside this bar, near the tuning pegs.

Except where indicated, the pedal must NEVER BE DOWN while the strings are being swept; as soon as the sweep is made, the pedal should be put down, and held until the time is ready to begin a new sweep, when it must be released.

Henry Cowell
(1923)

Tempo Rubato

inside *p*

pizz. *outside* *mf*

Ped. *

pizz. *Ped.*

(with back of thumb nail) *sw.* *ff*

(with flesh of finger) *pizz.* *sw.* *inside* *rit.* *p a tempo*

Figure 5.3: Henry Cowell. "Aeolian Harp." 1923.¹¹

Walter Windisch-Laube suggests that Cowell's audiences may have been "in expectation of a drawing room piece, for many of the leading salon composers had written "Aeolian harp" opuses [*sic*] up to the turn of the century, works which remained popular all over Europe as well as in

¹¹ Henry Cowell. "Aeolian Harp." *Piano Music*. New York: Associated Music Publishers, Inc., 1960: 10

the United States after World War I.”¹² Yet, both Bennett’s and Cowell’s Aeolian harp compositions resemble Bayle’s *L’Oiseau Chanteur* in the sense that they attempt to transfer and interpret the acousmatic sounds of an instrument (or animal) that doesn’t require human interaction to produce sound. While Cowell’s piece, like the other Aeolian harp songs discussed here, does not sound like an actual wind harp, Cowell’s experimental playing shifts the Aeolian harp from sentimental trope and parlor song into the avant-garde of the twentieth century.

Song from the Hill

The 1972 album, *Song from the Hill* by “The Wind Harp,” contains live field recordings of a large Aeolian harp; the sounds are atmospheric and haunting. While the album is a recording of an actual harp, not an interpretation of the harp’s sounds, it continues the nineteenth-century mode of defining the harp through poetry. The cover features a child standing by the large Aeolian harp, and features a brief poem:

She curled up in my lap
to listen to the wind
singing forth the dawn
daddy
who makes that song?¹³

This poem performs some of the same moves as the Aeolian harp poetry of almost two hundred years previous: positing the harp as making the wind audible, and inquiring about who (or what) produces the song or sound, highlighting the unknown, unseen nature of the music by way of a rhetorical question. Other albums such as *Nature’s Dream Harp* (1979) by Robin Archer—a title

¹² Windisch-Laube, 258.

¹³ The Wind Harp. *Song from the Hill*. United Artists Records, 1972.

that clearly participates in the Aeolian harp trends discussed in this dissertation-- and *Dis* (1977), by jazz musician Jan Garbarek, would feature the wind harp in ways that capture its sounds as a field recording, and as a haunting, ambient musical background.¹⁴

While the tropes of the Aeolian harp and the songbird cycled through the nineteenth century, becoming poetic clichés, then scholarly commonplaces in the twentieth, the idea of originless, acousmatic music went underground, as it were—into the realm of experimental performance and recording in the mid-twentieth century. Later in that century, albums like *Song from the Hill* and *Nature's Dream Harp* became precursors of countless “New Age” recordings, often featuring ambient soundscapes. The acousmatic was a mode of listening far earlier than the term’s formal usage and practice in the mid-twentieth century. Experimental musicians like Cowell, and *musique concrète* composers like Bayle were and are part of a poetic lineage that reaches back to the popular, sentimental works of the Romantic period, and of that era’s aesthetic valuation of acousmatic sound.

* * *

*They float along the charmed air
Like Music’s bird on hallow’d wings.*¹⁵

I close with this brief discussion of the acousmatic in the twentieth century to emphasize that, while twentieth-century composers like Bayle intentionalized the acousmatic, making it a central component of their practice, the lineage of the acousmatic, that is, ways of mimicking and evoking it, stretch back into the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and to works that may not immediately come to mind when we consider twentieth-century avant-gardes. When I began

¹⁴ Robin Archer. *Nature’s Dream Harp*. RA, 1979; Jan Garbarek. *Dis*. ECM Records, 1977.

¹⁵ Ludolf. “To an Aeolian Harp.” *The New-Yorker*, Nov 11, 1837: 544.

this project, what I found fascinating about Aeolian harp and the poetic songbird was the fact that they are sound tropes, but they had not been fully considered as such in the scholarship; instead, sound was put to the side in favor of their figurative meanings such as the harp as a metaphor for the poet's mind, or the bird as a symbol of melancholy. By considering them specifically through sound, I hoped to shed new light on figures often taken for granted.

The harp's resonances with the droning experimental music of the 1960s and 1970s had been noted, yet that connection had not been fully explored. Reading in the area of *musique concrète* provided me with the vocabulary to discuss what I was already finding in the poetry, primarily, the acousmatic. That vocabulary, and the theorizations of Brian Kane, Pierre Schaeffer, and Michel Chion became foundational for this project. Once I gained a vocabulary adequate to my topic, I was able to explain what I saw in the poetry I found; principally, that it performs, or gives the illusion of, acousmatic sound. This is how my approach differs from the standard interpretations of how, for example, the Aeolian harp operated in Romantic poetry. I also knew from the beginning that I needed to interrogate my two tropes' standing as clichés, both in the nineteenth-century poetry and in twentieth-century scholarship. Thinking though cliché itself as interrelated with sound was something that also came out of my reading in *musique concrète*, and the use of repetition as a primary tool of composition in that genre.

This project was also fundamentally shaped by research. However, when I began searching, I did not expect to find so vast a repertoire of Aeolian harp poetry and music. And, although I began with a hunch that the two were connected, I did not expect, at first, to find so much overlap in the poetry between the harp and the songbird. Therefore, I see my scholarly contribution as uncovering and gathering this large volume of previously unstudied poetry and

considering it from a unique standpoint. In so doing, I interrogate, in the case of the Aeolian harp, a figure of “high” Romanticism, a conception that this grouping of poetry helps to revise.

More than a figure for the poet’s mind, the harp was, for many, a part of daily household life, and the poetry was crucial for the appreciation of the object itself. I suggest that the ubiquitous poetry and the ubiquitous harps went hand in hand -- the harp inspired poetic dedications and celebrations of its sound -- and the poetry in turn cultivated the appreciation of the harp’s music, while attempting to recreate, or mimic it. Part of what drew me to the harp (and the bird) in the first place was the general sense, in the scholarship, that we already knew everything there was to know about what they mean or meant. In this way, historicizing the scholarship on the harp and the songbird was vital for this project. Just as the poetry I discuss works to obscure the source of the sound, so too does much of the scholarship I have discussed obscure the harp as an actual object.

Along those lines, another contribution this project makes is to Robert Bloomfield scholarship in particular, as his connections with the harp, and in turn, the harp’s connections to the trope of the peasant poet were previously unexplored. When I began researching Bloomfield, and the many Aeolian harp poems dedicated to him, I found striking convergences between the harp as an object and the harp as a poetic figure. This project also draws connections between the artistic and the artisanal. While this is something we now take for granted in the context of Blake studies, for example, it has not been a critical topic in the commentary on either the harp or on Bloomfield. Moreover, I address this aesthetic/artisanal coupling in a way that foregrounds the labor of both building a harp and writing poetry. In this way, my project also touches on the domestic reality of the harp as a physical artifact. While Bloomfield scholarship to date has discussed the harp, it mainly sees it an interesting footnote in Bloomfield’s life. However, I

demonstrate that it is integral to our understanding of Bloomfield's life and work, and I show too that Bloomfield, in turn, furnishes a crucial case study in the significance of harp in the early nineteenth-century, beyond the metaphor.

While much of this project is dedicated to examining previously unknown or under-discussed works, Chapter Four interrogates, in canonical works, many of the phenomena and practices that I unearthed in the unknown periodical poems. Here, I open onto the implications for canonical poetry that my archive suggests. In that chapter, I discuss Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" as feigning the same performance of "nature's music" that I discussed in chapter one, with respect to the Aeolian harp poetry. While a chapter on Victorian taxidermy could have been focused on natural history, this project instead discusses the poetic resonances of taxidermy, in keeping with the dissertation as a whole, which examines poetry and poetic tropes from a perspective of music and sound. Although I include late-nineteenth and even twentieth-century works, this dissertation is located within the discourse of British Romantic studies. My chief critical contribution is to challenge what scholarship has taken as the two fundamental Romantic metaphors, offering a new way to consider them, and in turn, offering a way to look at some twentieth-century avant-gardes as potentially sharing a lineage with tropes of mainstream, periodical, highly clichéd nineteenth-century poetry.

By its close, this project presents several paths for further work. One of which would be to consider gender more deeply; so many of the harp poems are anonymous, or are by named women, and it would be fruitful to explore the significance of that in relation to the masculine coding traditional for the Aeolian harp figure. Another would develop the account of Felicia Hemans and music; my chapter here only discusses three of the many settings of her other poems. Another still would discuss the "major" works here, such as Coleridge's "The Eolian

Harp (Effusion XXXV)” and “Dejection: an Ode,” for example, or Shelley’s comments on the harp, in the context of the archive of poetry I present here. As it is, poets of the stature of Coleridge and Shelley haunt the shadows of this project. And while I posit a lineage of the acousmatic in poetic tropes, and employ twentieth-century terms for the meanings and effects of those tropes, I chose not to discuss the harp as a sound technology that prefigured, say, the radio, phonograph, or an ambient sound phone app, on the view that doing so might encourage us to read the harp as a stage in an oversimplified technological teleology, one that relies too much on the way we listen now. I wanted to preserve the strangeness of the harp, a strangeness that shone through the popular language of sentiment in which the figure was couched in the literature. Instead of losing the strangeness of the harp’s and bird’s music in a wash of clichéd poetry, that wave of cliché, as I have shown, defines it.

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